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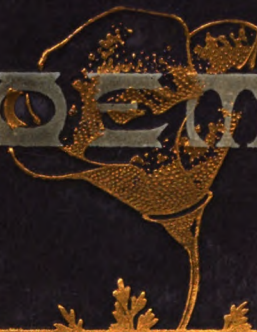
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Joaquin Miller's



POEMS



SONGS OF THE SUNLANDS



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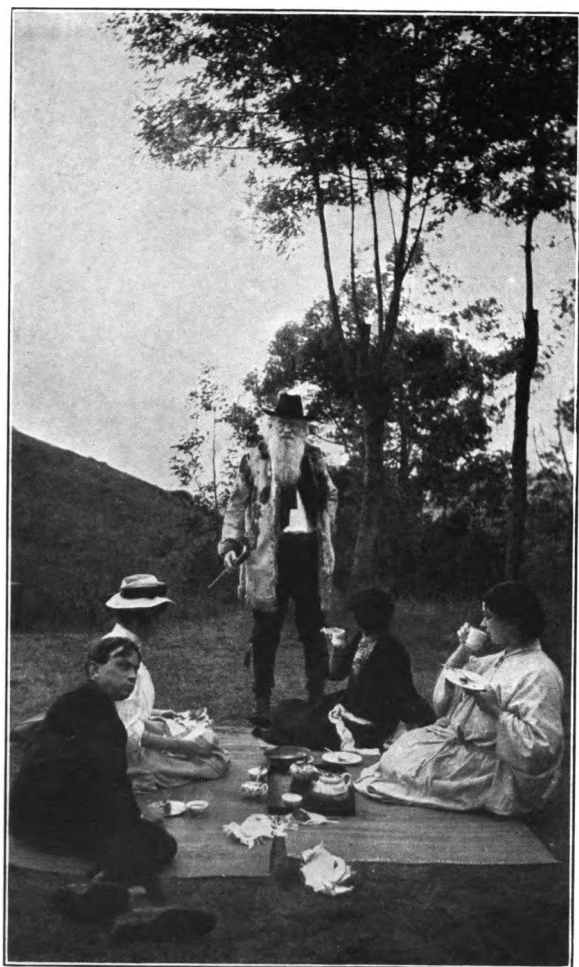












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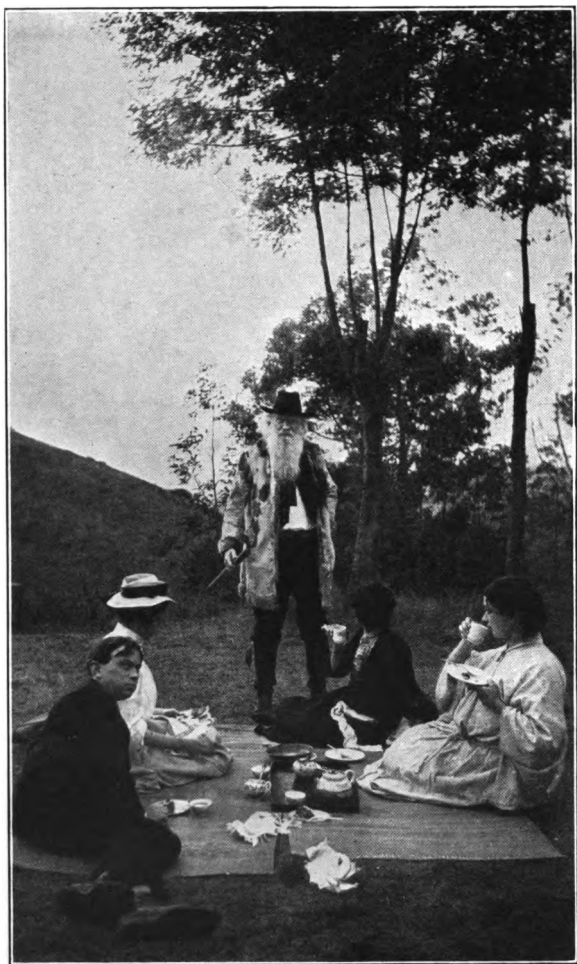


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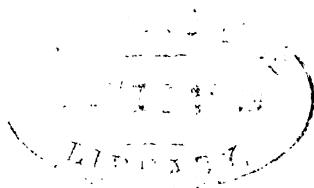


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TO  
MY PARENTS  
HULINGS  
AND MARGARET WITT MILLER



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# SONGS OF THE SUNLANDS





## THE SEA OF FIRE

*In a land so far that you wonder whether  
If God would know it should you fall down  
dead;*

*In a land so far through the soft, warm weather  
That the sun sinks red as a warrior sped,—  
Where the sea and the sky seem closing together,  
Seem closing together as a book that is read:*

*'Tis the half-finished world! Yon footfall re-  
treating,—*

*It might be the Maker disturbed at his task.  
But the footfall of God, or the far pheasant beat-  
ing,*

*It is one and the same, whatever the mask  
It may wear unto man. The woods keep repeat-  
ing*

*The old sacred sermons, whatever you ask.*

*It is man in his garden, scarce wakened as yet  
From the sleep that fell on him when woman  
was made.*

*The new-finished garden is plastic and wet  
From the hand that has fashioned its un-  
peopled shade;*

*And the wonder still looks from the fair woman's  
eyes*

*As she shines through the wood like the light  
from the skies.*

*And a ship now and then for this far Ophir shore  
Draws in from the sea. It lies close to the  
bank;*

## THE SEA OF FIRE

*Then a dull, muffled sound on the slow shuffled  
plank  
As they load the black ship; but you hear nothing  
more,  
And the dark, dewy vines, and the tall, somber  
wood  
Like twilight droop over the deep, sweeping  
flood.*

*The black masts are tangled with branches that  
cross,  
The rich fragrant gums fall from branches to  
deck,  
The thin ropes are swinging with streamers of  
moss  
That mantle all things like the shreds of a  
wreck;  
The long mosses swing, there is never a breath:  
The river rolls still as the river of death.*

### I

*In the beginning,—ay, before  
The six-day's labors were well o'er;  
Yea, while the world lay incomplete,  
Ere God had opened quite the door  
Of this strange land for strong men's feet,—  
There lay against that westmost sea,  
A weird, wild land of mystery.*

*A far white wall, like fallen moon,  
Girt out the world. The forest lay  
So deep you scarcely saw the day,  
Save in the high-held middle noon:  
It lay a land of sleep and dreams,*

## THE SEA OF FIRE

And clouds drew through like shoreless streams  
That stretch to where no man may say.

Men reached it only from the sea,  
By black-built ships, that seemed to creep  
Along the shore suspiciously,  
Like unnamed monsters of the deep.  
It was the weirdest land, I ween,  
That mortal eye has ever seen.

A dim, dark land of bird and beast,  
Black shaggy beasts with cloven claw,—  
A land that scarce knew prayer or priest,  
Or law of man, or Nature's law;  
Where no fixed line drew sharp dispute  
'Twixt savage man and sullen brute.

## II

It hath a history most fit  
For cunning hand to fashion on;  
No chronicler hath mentioned it;  
No buccaneer set foot upon.  
'Tis of an outlawed Spanish Don,—  
A cruel man, with pirate's gold  
That loaded down his deep ship's hold.

A deep ship's hold of plundered gold!  
The golden cruse, the golden cross,  
From many a church of Mexico,  
From Panama's mad overthrow,  
From many a ransomed city's loss,  
From many a follower fierce and bold,  
And many a foeman stark and cold.

## THE SEA OF FIRE

He found this wild, lost land. He drew  
His ship to shore. His ruthless crew,  
Like Romulus, laid lawless hand  
On meek brown maidens of the land,  
And in their bloody forays bore  
Red firebrands along the shore.

### III

The red men rose at night. They came,  
A firm, unflinching wall of flame;  
They swept, as sweeps some fateful sea  
O'er land of sand and level shore  
That howls in fár, fierce agony.  
The red men swept that deep, dark shore  
As threshers sweep a threshing floor.

And yet beside the slain Don's door  
They left his daughter, as they fled:  
They spared her life because she bore  
Their Chieftain's blood and name. The red  
And blood-stained hidden hoards of gold  
They hollowed from the stout ship's hold,  
And bore in many a slim canoe—  
To where? The good priest only knew.

### IV

The course of life is like the sea;  
Men come and go; tides rise and fall;  
And that is all of history.  
The tide flows in, flows out today—  
And that is all that man may say;  
Man is, man was,—and that is all.

## THE SEA OF FIRE

Revenge at last came like a tide,—  
’Twas sweeping, deep and terrible;  
The Christian found the land, and came  
To take possession in Christ’s name.  
For every white man that had died  
I think a thousand red men fell,—  
A Christian custom; and the land  
Lay lifeless as some burned-out brand.

### V

Ere while the slain Don’s daughter grew  
A glorious thing, a flower of spring,  
A something more than mortals knew;  
A mystery of grace and face,—  
A silent mystery that stood  
An empress in that sea-set wood,  
Supreme, imperial in her place.

It might have been men’s lust for gold,—  
For all men knew that lawless crew  
Left hoards of gold in that ship’s hold,  
That drew ships hence, and silent drew  
Strange Jasons there to love or dare;  
I never knew, nor need I care.

I say it might have been this gold  
That ever drew and strangely drew  
Strong men of land, strange men of sea  
To seek this shore of mystery  
With all its wondrous tales untold;  
The gold or her, which of the two?  
It matters not to me, nor you.

## THE SEA OF FIRE

But this I know, that as for me,  
Between that face and the hard fate  
That kept me ever from my own,  
As some wronged monarch from his throne,  
All heaped-up gold of land or sea  
Had never weighed one feather's weight.

Her home was on the wooded height,—  
A woody home, a priest at prayer,  
A perfume in the fervid air,  
And angels watching her at night.  
I can but think upon the skies  
That bound that other Paradise.

## VI

Below a star-built arch, as grand  
As ever bended heaven spanned,  
Tall trees like mighty columns grew—  
They loomed as if to pierce the blue,  
They reached, as reaching heaven through.

The shadowed stream rolled far below,  
Where men moved noiseless to and fro  
As in some vast cathedral, when  
The calm of prayer comes to men,  
And benedictions bless them so.

What wooded sea-banks, wild and steep!  
What trackless wood! what snowy cone  
That lifted from this wood alone!  
What wild, wide river, dark and deep!  
What ships against the shore asleep!

## THE SEA OF FIRE

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### VII

An Indian woman cautious crept  
About the land the while it slept,  
The relic of her perished race.  
She wore rich, rudely-fashioned bands  
Of gold above her bony hands;  
She hissed hot curses on the place!

### VIII

Go seek the red man's last retreat!  
What lonesome lands! what haunted lands!  
Red mouths of beasts, red men's red hands;  
Red prophet-priests, in mute defeat.  
From Incan temples overthrown  
To lorn Alaska's isles of bone  
The red man lives and dies alone.

His boundaries in blood are writ!  
His land is ghostland! That is his,  
Whatever we may claim of this;  
Beware how you shall enter it!  
He stands God's guardian of ghostlands;  
Yea, this same wrapped half-prophet stands  
All nude and voiceless, nearer to  
The dread, lone God than I or you.

### IX

This bronzed child, by that river's brink,  
Stood fair to see as you can think,  
As tall as tall reeds at her feet,  
As fresh as flowers in her hair;



## THE SEA OF FIRE

As sweet as flowers over-sweet,  
As fair as vision more than fair!

How beautiful she was! How wild!  
How pure as water-plant, this child,—  
This one wild child of Nature here  
Grown tall in shadows.

And how near  
To God, where no man stood between  
Her eyes and scenes no man hath seen,—  
This maiden that so mutely stood,  
The one lone woman of that wood.

Stop still, my friend, and do not stir,  
Shut close your page and think of her.  
The birds sang sweeter for her face;  
Her lifted eyes were like a grace  
To seamen of that solitude,  
However rough, however rude.

The rippled river of her hair,  
Flowed in such wondrous waves, somehow  
Flowed down divided by her brow,—  
It mantled her within its care,  
And flooded all her form below,  
In its uncommon fold and flow.

A perfume and an incense lay  
Before her, as an incense sweet  
Before blithe mowers of sweet May  
In early morn. Her certain feet  
Embarked on no uncertain way.

## THE SEA OF FIRE

---

Come, think how perfect before men,  
How sweet as sweet magnolia bloom  
Embalmed in dews of morning, when  
Rich sunlight leaps from midnight gloom  
Resolved to kiss, and swift to kiss  
Ere yet morn wakens man to bliss.

### X

The days swept on. Her perfect year  
Was with her now. The sweet perfume  
Of womanhood in holy bloom,  
As when red harvest blooms appear,  
Possessed her soul. The priest did pray  
That saints alone should pass that way.

A red bird built beneath her roof,  
Brown squirrels crossed her cabin sill,  
And welcome came or went at will.  
A hermit spider wove his web  
Above her door and plied his trade,  
With none to fright or make afraid.

The silly elk, the spotted fawn,  
And all dumb beasts that came to drink,  
That stealthy stole upon the brink  
By coming night or going dawn,  
On seeing her familiar face  
Would fearless stop and stand in place.

She was so kind, the beasts of night  
Gave her the road as if her right;  
The panther crouching overhead  
In sheen of moss would hear her tread,

## THE SEA OF FIRE

---

And bend his eyes, but never stir  
Lest he by chance might frighten her.

Yet in her splendid strength, her eyes,  
There lay the lightning of the skies;  
The love-hate of the lioness,  
To kill the instant or caress:  
A pent-up soul that sometimes grew  
Impatient; why, she hardly knew.

At last she sighed, uprose, and threw  
Her strong arms out as if to hand  
Her love, sun-born and all complete  
At birth, to some brave lover's feet  
On some far, fair, and unseen land,  
As knowing not quite what to do!

### XI

How beautiful she was! Why, she  
Was inspiration! She was born  
To walk God's sunlit hills at morn,  
Nor waste her by this wood-dark sea.  
What wonder, then, her soul's white wings  
Beat at its bars, like living things!

Once more she sighed! She wandered through  
The sea-bound wood, then stopped and drew  
Her hand above her face, and swept  
The lonesome sea, and all day kept  
Her face to sea, as if she knew  
Some day, some near or distant day,  
Her destiny should come that way.

## THE SEA OF FIRE

### XII

How proud she was! How darkly fair!  
How full of faith, of love, of strength!  
Her calm, proud eyes! Her great hair's length,—  
Her long, strong, tumbled, careless hair,  
Half curled and knotted anywhere,—  
By brow or breast, or cheek or chin,  
For love to trip and tangle in!

### XIII

At last a tall strange sail was seen:  
It came so slow, so wearily,  
Came creeping cautious up the sea,  
As if it crept from out between  
The half-closed sea and sky that lay  
Tight wedged together, far away.

She watched it, wooed it. She did pray  
It might not pass her by but bring  
Some love, some hate, some anything,  
To break the awful loneliness  
That like a nightly nightmare lay  
Upon her proud and pent-up soul  
Until it barely brooked control.

### XIV

The ship crept silent up the sea,  
And came—

You cannot understand  
How fair she was, how sudden she  
Had sprung, full grown, to womanhood.  
How gracious, yet how proud and grand;

## THE SEA OF FIRE

How glorified, yet fresh and free,  
How human, yet how more than good.

### XV

The ship stole slowly, slowly on;—  
Should you in Californian field  
In ample flower-time behold  
The soft south rose lift like a shield  
Against the sudden sun at dawn,  
A double handful of heaped gold,  
Why you, perhaps, might understand  
How splendid and how queenly she  
Uprose beside that wood-set sea.

The storm-worn ship scarce seemed to creep  
From wave to wave. It scarce could keep—  
How still this fair girl stood, how fair!  
How tall her presence as she stood  
Between that vast sea and west wood!  
How large and liberal her soul,  
How confident, how purely chare,  
How trusting; how untried the whole  
Great heart, grand faith, that blossomed there.

### XVI

Ay, she was as Madonna to  
The tawny, lawless, faithful few  
Who touched her hand and knew her soul:  
She drew them, drew them as the pole  
Points all things to itself.

## THE SEA OF FIRE

She drew  
Men upward as a moon of spring  
High wheeling, vast and bosom-full,  
Half clad in clouds and white as wool,  
Draws all the strong seas following.

Yet still she moved as sad, as lone  
As that same moon that leans above,  
And seems to search high heaven through  
For some strong, all sufficient love,  
For one brave love to be her own,  
Be all her own and ever true.

Oh, I once knew a sad, sweet dove  
That died for such sufficient love,  
Such high, white love with wings to soar,  
That looks love level in the face,  
Nor wearies love with leaning o'er  
To lift love level to her place.

### XVII

How slow before the sleeping breeze,  
That stranger ship from under seas!  
How like to Dido by her sea,  
When reaching arms imploringly,—  
Her large, round, rich, impassiond arms,  
Tossed forth from all her storied charms—  
This one lone maiden leaning stood  
Above that sea, beneath that wood!

The ship crept strangely up the seas;  
Her shrouds seemed shreds, her masts seemed  
trees,—  
Strange tattered trees of toughest bough

## THE SEA OF FIRE

That knew no cease of storm till now.  
The maiden pitied her; she prayed  
Her crew might come, nor feel afraid;  
She prayed the winds might come,—they came,  
As birds that answer to a name.

The maiden held her blowing hair  
That bound her beauteous self about;  
The sea-winds housed within her hair;  
She let it go, it blew in rout  
About her bosom full and bare.  
Her round, full arms were free as air,  
Her high hands clasped as clasped in prayer.

## XVIII

The breeze grew bold, the battered ship  
Began to flap her weary wings;  
The tall, torn masts began to dip  
And walk the wave like living things.  
She rounded in, moved up the stream,  
She moved like some majestic dream.

The captain kept her deck. He stood  
A Hercules among his men;  
And now he watched the sea, and then  
He peered as if to pierce the wood.  
He now looked back, as if pursued,  
Now swept the sea with glass as though  
He fled, or feared some prowling foe.

Slow sailing up the river's mouth,  
Slow tacking north, slow tacking south,  
He touched the overhanging wood;  
He kept his deck, his tall black mast

## THE SEA OF FIRE

Touched tree-top mosses as he passed;  
He touched the steep shore where she stood.

### XIX

Her hands still clasped as if in prayer,  
Sweet prayer set to silentness;  
Her sun-browned throat uplifted, bare  
And beautiful.

Her eager face  
Illumed with love and tenderness,  
And all her presence gave such grace,  
That she seemed more than mortal, fair.

### XX

He saw. He could not speak. No more  
With lifted glass he swept the sea;  
No more he watched the wild new shore.  
Now foes might come, now friends might flee;  
He could not speak, he would not stir,—  
He saw but her, he feared but her.

The black ship ground against the shore,  
With creak and groan and rusty clank,  
And tore the mellow blossomed bank;  
She ground against the bank as one  
With long and weary journeys done,  
That will not rise to journey more.

Yet still tall Jason silent stood  
And gazed against that sea-washed wood,  
As one whose soul is anywhere.  
All seemed so fair, so wondrous fair!  
At last aroused, he stepped to land



## THE SEA OF FIRE

Like some Columbus; then laid hand  
On lands and fruits, and rested there.

### XXI

He found all fairer than fair morn  
In sylvan land, where waters run  
With downward leap against the sun,  
And full-grown sudden May is born.  
He found her taller than tall corn  
Tiptoe in tassel; found her sweet  
As vale where bees of Hybla meet.

An unblown rose, an unread book;  
A wonder in her wondrous eyes;  
A large, religious, steadfast look  
Of faith, of trust,—the look of one  
New fashioned in fair Paradise.

He read this book—read on and on  
From title page to colophon:  
As in cool woods, some summer day,  
You find delight in some sweet lay,  
And so entranced read on and on  
From title page to colophon.

### XXII

And who was he that rested there,—  
This giant of a grander day,  
This Theseus of a nobler Greece,  
This Jason of the golden fleece?  
Aye, who was he? And who were they  
That came to seek the hidden gold

## THE SEA OF FIRE

Long hollowed from the pirate's hold?  
I do not know. You need not care.

\* \* \* \* \*

They loved, this maiden and this man,  
And that is all I surely know,—  
The rest is as the winds that blow,  
He bowed as brave men bow to fate,  
Yet proud and resolute and bold;  
She shy at first, and coyly cold,  
Held back and tried to hesitate,—  
Half frightened at this love that ran  
Hard gallop till her hot heart beat  
Like sounding of swift courser's feet.

### XXIII

Two strong streams of a land must run  
Together surely as the sun  
Succeeds the moon. Who shall gainsay  
The gods that reign, that wisely reign?  
Love is, love was, shall be again.  
Like death, inevitable it is;  
Perchance, like death, the dawn of bliss.  
Let us, then, love the perfect day,  
The twelve o'clock of life, and stop  
The two hands pointing to the top,  
And hold them tightly while we may.

### XXIV

How beautiful is love! The walks  
By wooded ways; the silent talks  
Beneath the broad and fragrant bough.  
The dark deep wood, the dense black dell,

[ 17 ]

## THE SEA OF FIRE

Where scarce a single gold beam fell  
From out the sun.

They rested now  
On mossy trunk. They wandered then  
Where never fell the feet of men.  
Then longer walks, then deeper woods,  
Then sweeter talks, sufficient sweet,  
In denser, deeper solitudes,—  
Dear careless ways for careless feet;  
Sweet talks of paradise for two,  
And only two to watch or woo.

She rarely spake. All seemed a dream  
She would not waken from. She lay  
All night but waiting for the day,  
When she might see his face, and deem  
This man, with all his perils passed,  
Had found sweet Lotus-land at last.

### XXV

The year waxed fervid, and the sun  
Fell central down. The forest lay  
A-quiver in the heat. The sea  
Below the steep bank seemed to run  
A molten sea of gold.

Away  
Against the gray and rock-built isles  
That broke the molten watery miles  
Where lonesome sea-cows called all day,  
The sudden sun smote angrily.

Therefore the need of deeper deeps,  
Of denser shade for man and maid,

## THE SEA OF FIRE

Of higher heights, of cooler steeps,  
Where all day long the sea-wind stayed.

They sought the rock-reared steep. The  
breeze  
Swept twenty thousand miles of seas;  
Had twenty thousand things to say,  
Of love, of lovers of Cathay,  
To lovers 'mid these mossy trees.

### XXVI

To left, to right, below the height,  
Below the wood by wave and stream,  
Plumed pampas grass did wave and gleam  
And bend their lordly plumes, and run  
And shake, as if in very fright  
Before sharp lances of the sun.

They saw the tide-bound, battered ship  
Creep close below against the bank;  
They saw it cringe and shrink; it shrank  
As shrinks some huge black beast with fear,  
When some uncommon dread is near.  
They heard the melting resin drip,  
As drip the last brave blood-drops when  
Red battle waxes hot with men.

### XXVII

Yet what to her were burning seas,  
Or what to him was forest flame?  
They loved; they loved the glorious trees;  
The gleaming tides might rise or fall,—  
They loved the whispering winds that came

## THE SEA OF FIRE

From sea-lost spice-set isles unknown,  
With breath not warmer than their own;  
They loved, they loved,—and that was all.

### XXVIII

Full noon! Above, the ancient moss  
From mighty boughs swang slow across,  
As when some priest slow chants a prayer  
And swings sweet smoke and perfumed air  
From censer swinging—anywhere.

He spake of love, of boundless love,—  
Of love that knew no other land,  
Or face, or place, or anything;  
Of love that like the wearied dove  
Could light nowhere, but kept the wing  
Till she alone put forth her hand  
And so received it in her ark  
From seas that shake against the dark!

Her proud breast heaved, her pure, bare breast  
Rose like the waves in their unrest  
When counter storms possess the seas.  
Her mouth, her arch, uplifted mouth,  
Her ardent mouth that thirsted so,—  
No glowing love song of the South  
Can say; no man can say or know  
Such truth as lies beneath such trees.

Her face still lifted up. And she  
Disdained the cup of passion he  
Hard pressed her panting lips to touch.  
She dashed it by, uprose, and she  
Caught fast her breath. She trembled much,

## THE SEA OF FIRE

Then sudden rose full height, and stood  
An empress in high womanhood:  
She stood a tower, tall as when  
Proud Roman mothers suckled men  
Of old-time truth and taught them such.

### XXIX

Her soul surged vast as space is. She  
Was trembling as a courser when  
His thin flank quivers, and his feet  
Touch velvet on the turf, and he  
Is all afoam, alert and fleet  
As sunlight glancing on the sea,  
And full of triumph before men.

At last she bended some her face,  
Half leaned, then put him back a pace,  
And met his eyes.

Calm, silently  
Her eyes looked deep into his eyes,—  
As maidens search some mossy well  
And peer in hope by chance to tell  
By image there what future lies  
Before them, and what face shall be  
The pole-star of their destiny.

Pure Nature's lover! Loving him  
With love that made all pathways dim  
And difficult where he was not,—  
Then marvel not at forms forgot.  
And who shall chide? Doth priest know aught  
Of sign, or holy unction brought  
From over seas, that ever can

## THE SEA OF FIRE

---

Make man love maid or maid love man  
One whit the more, one bit the less,  
For all his mummeries to bless?  
Yea, all his blessings or his ban?

The winds breathed warm as Araby;  
She leaned upon his breast, she lay  
A wide-winged swan with folded wing.  
He drowned his hot face in her hair,  
He heard her great heart rise and sing;  
He felt her bosom swell.

The air  
Swooned sweet with perfume of her form.  
Her breast was warm, her breath was warm,  
And warm her warm and perfumed mouth  
As summer journeys through the south.

### XXX

The argent sea surged steep below,  
Surged languid in such tropic glow;  
And two great hearts kept surging so!  
The fervid kiss of heaven lay  
Precipitate on wood and sea.  
Two great souls glowed with ecstasy,  
The sea glowed scarce as warm as they.

### XXXI

'Twas love's warm amber afternoon.  
Two far-off pheasants thrummed a tune,  
A cricket clanged a restful air.  
The dreamful billows beat a rune  
Like heart regrets.

## THE SEA OF FIRE

                                Around her head  
There shone a halo. Men have said  
'Twas from a dash of Titian red  
That flooded all her storm of hair  
In gold and glory. But they knew,  
Yea, all men know there ever grew  
A halo round about her head  
Like sunlight scarcely vanished.

### XXXII

How still she was! She only knew  
His love. She saw no life beyond.  
She loved with love that only lives  
Outside itself and selfishness,—  
A love that glows in its excess;  
A love that melts pure gold, and gives  
Thenceforth to all who come to woo  
No coins but this face stamped thereon, —  
Ay, this one image stamped upon  
Pure gold, with some dim date long gone.

### XXXIII

They kept the headland high; the ship  
Below began to chafe her chain,  
To groan as some great beast in pain:  
While white fear leapt from lip to lip:  
"The woods on fire! The woods in flame!  
Come down and save us in God's name!"

He heard! he did not speak or stir,—  
He thought of her, of only her,  
While flames behind, before them lay  
To hold the stoutest heart at bay!



## THE SEA OF FIRE

Strange sounds were heard far up the flood,  
Strange, savage sounds that chilled the blood!  
Then sudden, from the dense, dark wood  
Above, about them where they stood  
Strange, hairy beasts came peering out;  
And now was thrust a long black snout,  
And now a tusky mouth. It was  
A sight to make the stoutest pause.

"Cut loose the ship!" the black mate cried;  
"Cut loose the ship!" the crew replied.  
They drove into the sea. It lay  
As light as ever middle day.

And then a half-blind bitch that sat  
All slobber-mouthed, and monkish cowed  
With great, broad, floppy, leathern ears  
Amid the men, rose up and howled,  
And doleful howled her plaintive fears,  
While all looked mute aghast thereat.  
It was the grimmest eve, I think,  
That ever hung on Hades' brink.  
Great broad-winged bats possessed the air,  
Bats whirling blindly everywhere;  
It was such troubled twilight eve  
As never mortal would believe.

### XXXIV

Some say the crazed hag lit the wood  
In circle where the lovers stood;  
Some say the gray priest feared the crew  
Might find at last the hoard of gold  
Long hidden from the black ship's hold,—  
I doubt me if men ever knew.

## THE SEA OF FIRE

But such mad, howling, flame-lit shore  
No mortal ever knew before.

Huge beasts above that shining sea,  
Wild, hideous beasts with shaggy hair,  
With red mouths lifting in the air,  
All piteous howled, and plaintively,—  
The wildest sounds, the weirdest sight  
That ever shook the walls of night.

How lorn they howled, with lifted head,  
To dim and distant isles that lay  
Wedged tight along a line of red,  
Caught in the closing gates of day  
'Twixt sky and sea and far away,—  
It was the saddest sound to hear  
That ever struck on human ear.

They doleful called; and answered they  
The plaintiff sea-cows far away,—  
The great sea-cows that called from isles,  
Away across red flaming miles,  
With dripping mouths and lolling tongue,  
As if they called for captured young,—

The huge sea-cows that called the whiles  
Their great wide mouths were mouthing moss;  
And still they doleful called across  
From isles beyond the watery miles.  
No sound can half so doleful be  
As sea-cows calling from the sea.

## THE SEA OF FIRE

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### XXXV

The sun, outdone, lay down. He lay  
In seas of blood. He sinking drew  
The gates of sunset sudden to,  
And they in shattered fragments lay.  
Then night came, moving in mad flame;  
Then full night, lighted as he came,  
As lighted by high summer sun  
Descending through the burning blue.  
It was a gold and amber hue,  
Aye, all hues blended into one.

The moon came on, came leaning low.  
The moon spilled splendor where she came,  
And filled the world with yellow flame  
Along the far sea-isles aglow;  
She fell along that amber flood,  
A silver flame in seas of blood.  
It was the strangest moon, ah me!  
That ever settled on God's sea.

### XXXVI

Slim snakes slid down from fern and grass,  
From wood, from fen, from anywhere;  
You could not step, you could not pass,  
And you would hesitate to stir,  
Lest in some sudden, hurried tread  
Your foot struck some unbruised head:

It seemed like some infernal dream;  
They slid in streams into the stream;  
They curved and sinuous curved across,  
Like living streams of living moss,—

## THE SEA OF FIRE

There is no art of man can make  
A ripple like a swimming snake!

### XXXVII

Encompassed, lorn, the lovers stood,  
Abandoned there, death in the air!  
That beetling steep, that blazing wood—  
Red flame! red flame, and everywhere!  
Yet he was born to strive, to bear  
The front of battle. He would die  
In noble effort, and defy  
The grizzled visage of despair.

He threw his two strong arms full length  
As if to surely test their strength;  
Then tore his vestments, textile things  
That could but tempt the demon wings  
Of flame that girt them round about,  
Then threw his garments to the air  
As one that laughed at death, at doubt,  
And like a god stood thewed and bare.

She did not hesitate; she knew  
The need of action; swift she threw  
Her burning vestments by, and bound  
Her wondrous wealth of hair that fell  
An all-concealing cloud around  
Her glorious presence, as he came  
To seize and bear her through the flame,—  
An Orpheus out of burning hell!

He leaned above her, wound his arm  
About her splendor, while the noon  
Of flood tide, manhood, flushed his face,

## THE SEA OF FIRE

And high flames leapt the high headland!—  
They stood as twin-hewn statues stand,  
High lifted in some storied place.

He clasped her close, he spoke of death,—  
Of death and love in the same breath.  
He clasped her close; her bosom lay  
Like ship safe anchored in some bay,  
Where never rage or rack of main  
Might even shake her anchor chain.

### XXXVIII

The flames! They could not stand or stay;  
Beyond, the beetling steep, the sea!  
But at his feet a narrow way,  
A short steep path, pitched suddenly  
Safe open to the river's beach,  
Where lay a small white isle in reach,—  
A small, white, rippled isle of sand  
Where yet the two might safely land.

And there, through smoke and flame, behold  
The priest stood safe, yet all appalled!  
He reached the cross; he cried, he called;  
He waved his high-held cross of gold.  
He called and called, he bade them fly  
Through flames to him, nor bide and die!

Her lover saw; he saw, and knew  
His giant strength could bear her through.  
And yet he would not start or stir.  
He clasped her close as death can hold,

## THE SEA OF FIRE

---

Or dying miser clasp his gold,—  
His hold became a part of her.

He would not give her up! He would  
Not bear her waveward though he could!  
That height was heaven; the wave was hell.  
He clasped her close,—what else had done  
The manliest man beneath the sun?  
Was it not well? was it not well?

O man, be glad! be grandly glad,  
And king-like walk thy ways of death!  
For more than years of bliss you had  
That one brief time you breathed her breath,  
Yea, more than years upon a throne  
That one brief time you held her fast,  
Soul surged to soul, vehement, vast,—  
True breast to breast, and all your own.

Live me one day, one narrow night,  
One second of supreme delight  
Like that, and I will blow like chaff  
The hollow years aside, and laugh  
A loud triumphant laugh, and I,  
King-like and crowned, will gladly die.

Oh, but to wrap my love with flame!  
With flame within, with flame without!  
Oh, but to die like this, nor doubt—  
To die and know her still the same!  
To know that down the ghostly shore  
Snow-white she walks for ever more!

XXXIX

He poised her, held her high in air,—  
His great strong limbs, his great arm's length!—  
Then turned his knotted shoulders bare  
As birth-time in his splendid strength,  
And strode with lordly, kingly stride  
To where the high and wood-hung edge  
Looked down, far down upon the molten tide.  
The flames leaped with him to the ledge,  
The flames leapt leering at his side.

XL

He leaned above the ledge. Below  
He saw the black ship grope and cruise,—  
A midge below, a mile below.  
His limbs were knotted as the thews  
Of Hercules in his death-throe.

The flame! the flame! the envious flame!  
She wound her arms, she wound her hair  
About his tall form, grand and bare,  
To stay the fierce flame where it came.

The black ship, like some moonlit wreck,  
Below along the burning sea  
Groped on and on all silently,  
With silent pigmies on her deck.

That midge-like ship, far, far below;  
That mirage lifting from the hill!  
His flame-lit form began to grow,—  
To glow and grow more grandly still.

## THE SEA OF FIRE

---

The ship so small, that form so tall,  
It grew to tower over all.

A tall Colossus, bronze and gold,  
As if that flame-lit form were he  
Who once bestrode the Rhodian sea,  
And ruled the watery world of old:  
As if the lost Colossus stood  
Above that burning sea of wood.

And she! that shapely form upheld,  
Held high as if to touch the sky,  
What airy shape, how shapely high,—  
What goddess of the seas of eld!

Her hand upheld, her high right hand,  
As if she would forget the land;  
As if to gather stars, and heap  
The stars like torches there to light  
Her hero's path across the deep  
To some far isle that fearful night.

### XLI

The envious flame, one moment leapt  
Enraged to see such majesty,  
Such scorn of death; such kingly scorn . . .  
Then like some lightning-riven tree  
They sank down in that flame—and slept.  
Then all was hushed above that steep  
So still that they might sleep and sleep,  
As when a Summer's day is born.

At last! from out the embers leapt  
Two shafts of light above the night,—



## THE SEA OF FIRE

Two wings of flame that lifting swept  
In steady, calm, and upward flight;  
Two wings of flame against the white  
Far-lifting, tranquil, snowy cone;  
Two wings of love, two wings of light,  
Far, far above that troubled night,  
As mounting, mounting to God's throne.

### XLII

And all night long that upward light  
Lit up the sea-cow's bed below:  
The far sea-cows still calling so  
It seemed as they must call all night.  
All night! there was no night. Nay, nay,  
There was no night. The night that lay  
Between that awful eve and day,—  
That nameless night was burned away.

Byron, Keats, Shelley, Browning, all poets, as a rule fled from the commercial centers, went out from under the mists and mirk into the sunlight to sing. I warn the coming poet that as a poet his place is not in any city. Be advised, or have done with aspiration to do new work or true work. The Old World has been written, written fully and bravely and well. It is only the vast, far, New World that needs you. He who is aiming to sit down in New York, or any city, and eat dinners that are cooked and seasoned by servants who are not given even as much time to go to church as were the slaves of the South, may be good enough and write well enough to please the city in these headlong days, but the real poet would rather house with a half savage and live on a sixpence in some mountain village, as did Byron, than feast off the board of Madame Leo Hunter in a city. Nor is Washington a better place for work with soul or heart in it. Madame Leo Hunter is there also, persistent, numerous, superficial and soulless as in almost any great center. If I am cruel, O my coming poets, I am cruel to be kind. Go forth in the sun, away into the wilds or contentedly

## THE SEA OF FIRE

---

lay aside your aspirations of song. Now, mark you distinctly, I am not writing for nor of the poets of the Old World or the Atlantic seaboard. They have their work and their ways of work. My notes are for the songless Alaskas, Canadas, Californias, the Aztec lands and the Argentines that patiently await their coming prophets. For come they will; but I warn them they will have to gird themselves mightily and pass through fire, and perish, many a man; for these new worlds will be whistling, out of time, the tunes of the old, and the rich and the proud will say in their insolence and ignorance, "Pipe thus, for thus piped the famous pipers of old; piping of perished kings, of wars, of castle walls, of battling knights, and of maids betrayed. Sing as of old or be silent, for we know not, we want not, and we will not, your seas of colors, your forests of perfumes, your mountains of melodies."



## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

*A wild, wide land of mysteries,  
Of sea-salt lakes and dried up seas,  
And lonely wells and pools; a land  
That seems so like dead Palestine,  
Save that its wastes have no confine  
Till push'd against the levell'd skies.  
A land from out whose depths shall rise  
The new-time prophets. Yea, the land  
From out whose awful depths shall come,  
A lowly man, with dusty feet,  
A man fresh from his Maker's hand,  
A singer singing oversweet,  
A charmer charming very wise;  
And then all men shall not be dumb.  
Nay, not be dumb; for he shall say,  
"Take heed, for I prepare the way  
For weary feet." Lo! from this land  
Of Jordan streams and dead sea sand,  
The Christ shall come when next the race  
Of man shall look upon His face.*

### I

A man in middle Aridzone  
Stood by the desert's edge alone,  
And long he look'd, and lean'd and peer'd,  
And twirl'd and twirl'd his twist'd beard,  
Beneath a black and slouchy hat—  
Nay, nay, the tale is not of that.

A skin-clad trapper, toe-a-tip,  
Stood on a mountain top; and he  
Look'd long, and still, and eagerly.

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

"It looks so like some lonesome ship  
That sails this ghostly, lonely sea,—  
This dried-up desert sea," said he,  
"These tawny sands of buried seas"—  
Avant! this tale is not of these!

A chief from out the desert's rim  
Rode swift as twilight swallows swim,  
And O! his supple steed was fleet!  
About his breast flapped panther skins,  
About his eager flying feet  
Flapp'd beaded, braided moccasins:  
He stopp'd, stock still, as still as stone,  
He lean'd, he look'd, there glisten'd bright,  
From out the yellow, yielding sand,  
A golden cup with jewell'd rim.

He lean'd him low, he reach'd a hand,  
He caught it up, he gallop'd on,  
He turn'd his head, he saw a sight—  
His panther-skins flew to the wind,  
He rode into the rim of night;  
The dark, the desert lay behind;  
The tawny Ishmaelite was gone.

He reach'd the town, and there held up  
Above his head the jewel'd cup.  
He put two fingers to his lip,  
He whisper'd wild, he stood a-tip,  
And lean'd the while with lifted hand,  
And said, "A ship lies yonder dead,"  
And said, "Such things lie sown in sand  
In yon far desert dead and brown,  
Beyond where wave-wash'd walls look down,  
As thick as stars set overhead."

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

"'Tis from that desert ship," they said,  
"That sails with neither sail nor breeze  
The lonely bed of dried-up seas,—  
A galleon that sank below  
White seas ere Red men drew the bow."

By Arizona's sea of sand  
Some bearded miners, gray and old,  
And resolute in search of gold,  
Sat down to tap the savage land.  
A miner stood beside the mine,  
He pull'd his beard, then looked away  
Across the level sea of sand,  
Beneath his broad and hairy hand,  
A hand as hard as knots of pine.  
"It looks so like a sea," said he.  
He pull'd his beard, and he did say,  
"It looks just like a dried-up sea."  
Again he pull'd that beard of his,  
But said no other thing than this.

A stalwart miner dealt a stroke,  
And struck a buried beam of oak.  
The miner twisted, twirl'd his beard,  
Lean'd on his pick-ax as he spoke:  
"'Tis that same long-lost ship," he said,  
"Some laden ship of Solomon  
That sail'd these lonesome seas upon  
In search of Ophir's mine, ah me!  
That sail'd this dried-up desert sea."

## II

Now this the tale. Along the wide  
Missouri's stream some silent braves,

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

That stole along the farther side  
Through sweeping wood that swept the waves  
Like long arms reach'd across the tide,  
Kept watch and every foe defied.

A low, black boat that hugg'd the shores,  
An ugly boat, an ugly crew,  
Thick-lipp'd and woolly-headed slaves,  
That bow'd, and bent the white-ash oars,  
That cleft the murky waters through,  
Slow climb'd the swift Missouri's waves.

A grand old Neptune in the prow,  
Gray-hair'd, and white with touch of time,  
Yet strong as in his middle prime,  
Stood up, turn'd suddenly, look'd back  
Along his low boat's wrinkled track,  
Then drew his mantle tight, and now  
He sat all silently. Beside  
The grim old sea-king sat his bride,  
A sun land blossom, rudely torn  
From tropic forests to be worn  
Above as stern a breast as e'er  
Stood king at sea, or anywhere.

Another boat with other crew  
Came swift and cautious in her track,  
And now shot shoreward, now shot back,  
And now sat rocking fro and to,  
But never once lost sight of her.  
Tall, sunburnt, southern men were these  
From isles of blue Caribbean seas,  
And one, that woman's worshiper,  
Who look'd on her, and loved but her.

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

And one, that one, was wild as seas  
That wash the far, dark Oregon.  
And one, that one, had eyes to teach  
The art of love, and tongue to preach  
Life's hard and sober homilies,  
While he stood leaning, urging on.

### III

Pursuer and pursued. And who  
Are these that make the sable crew;  
These mighty Titans, black and nude,  
Who dare this Red man's solitude?

And who is he that leads them here,  
And breaks the hush of wave and wood?  
Comes he for evil or for good?  
Brave Jesuit or bold buccaneer?

Nay, these be idle themes. Let pass.  
These be but men. We may forget  
The wild sea-king, the tawny brave,  
The frowning wold, the woody shore,  
The tall-built, sunburnt man of Mars.  
But what and who was she, the fair?  
The fairest face that ever yet  
Look'd in a wave as in a glass;  
That look'd, as look the still, far stars,  
So woman-like, into the wave  
To contemplate their beauty there?

I only saw her, heard the sound  
Of murky waters gurgling round  
In counter-currents from the shore,  
But heard the long, strong stroke of oar

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

Against the water gray and vast;  
I only saw her as she pass'd—  
A great, sad beauty, in whose eyes  
Lay all the peace of Paradise.

O you had loved her sitting there,  
Half hidden in her loosen'd hair;  
Yea, loved her for her large dark eyes,  
Her push'd out mouth, her mute surprise—  
Her mouth! 'twas Egypt's mouth of old,  
Push'd out and pouting full and bold  
With simple beauty where she sat.  
Why, you had said, on seeing her,  
This creature comes from out the dim,  
Far centuries, beyond the rim  
Of time's remotest reach or stir;  
And he who wrought Semiramis  
And shaped the Sibyls, seeing this,  
Had kneeled and made a shrine thereat,  
And all his life had worshipp'd her.

### IV

The black men bow'd, the long oars bent,  
They struck as if for sweet life's sake,  
And one look'd back, but no man spake,  
And all wills bent to one intent.  
On, through the golden fringe of day  
Into the deep, dark night, away  
And up the wave 'mid walls of wood  
They cleft, they climb'd, they bow'd, they bent,  
But one stood tall, and restless stood,  
And one sat still all night, all day,  
And gazed in helpless wonderment.



## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

Her hair pour'd down like darkling wine,  
The black men lean'd a sullen line,  
The bent oars kept a steady song,  
And all the beams of bright sunshine  
That touch'd the waters wild and strong,  
Fell drifting down and out of sight  
Like fallen leaves, and it was night.

And night and day, and many days  
They climb'd the sullen, dark gray tide.  
And she sat silent at his side,  
And he sat turning many ways;  
Sat watching for his wily foe.  
At last he baffled him. And yet  
His brow gloom'd dark, his lips were set;  
He lean'd, he peer'd through boughs, as though  
From heart of forests deep and dim  
Grim shapes might come confronting him.

A stern, uncommon man was he,  
Broad-shoulder'd, as of Gothic form,  
Strong-built, and hoary like a sea;  
A high sea broken up by storm.  
His face was brown and over-wrought  
By seams and shadows born of thought,  
Not over-gentle. And his eyes,  
Bold, restless, resolute and deep,  
Too deep to flow like shallow fount  
Of common men where waters mount;—  
Fierce, lumined eyes, where flames might rise  
Instead of flood, and flash and sweep—  
Strange eyes, that look'd unsatisfied  
With all things fair or otherwise;  
As if his inmost soul had cried

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

All time for something yet unseen,  
Some long-desired thing denied.

### V

Below the overhanging boughs  
The oars lay idle at the last ;  
Yet long he look'd for hostile prows  
From out the wood and down the stream.  
They came not, and he came to dream  
Pursuit abandon'd, danger past.

He fell'd the oak, he built a home  
Of new-hewn wood with busy hand,  
And said, "My wanderings are told,"  
And said, "No more by sea, by land,  
Shall I break rest, or drift, or roam,  
For I am worn, and I grow old."

And there, beside that surging tide,  
Where gray waves meet, and wheel, and strike,  
The man sat down as satisfied  
To sit and rest unto the end ;  
As if the strong man here had found  
A sort of brother in this sea,—  
This surging, sounding majesty,  
Of troubled water, so profound,  
So sullen, strong, and lion-like,  
So lawless in its every round.

Hast seen Missouri cleave the wood  
In sounding whirlpools to the sea ?  
What soul hath known such majesty ?  
What man stood by and understood ?

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

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### VI

Now long the long oars idle lay.  
The cabin's smoke came forth and curl'd  
Right lazily from river brake,  
And Time went by the other way.  
And who was she, the strong man's pride,  
This one fair woman of his world?  
A captive? Bride, or not a bride?  
Her eyes, men say, grew sad and dim  
With watching from the river's rim,  
As waiting for some face denied.

Yea, who was she? none ever knew.  
The great, strong river swept around  
The cabin nestled in its bend,  
But kept its secrets. Wild birds flew  
In beves by. The black men found  
Diversion in the chase; and wide  
Old Morgan ranged the wood, nor friend  
Nor foeman ever sought his side,  
Or shared his forests deep and dim,  
Or cross'd his path or question'd him.

He stood as one who found and named  
The middle world. What visions flamed  
Athwart the west! What prophecies  
Were his, the gray old man, that day  
Who stood alone and look'd away,—  
Awrest from out the waving trees,  
Against the utter sundown seas.

Alone ofttime beside the stream  
He stood and gazed as in a dream,—  
As if he knew a life unknown

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

To those who knew him thus alone.  
His eyes were gray and overborne  
By shaggy brows, his strength was shorn,  
Yet still he ever gazed awest,  
As one that would not, could not rest.

And had he fled with bloody hand?  
Or had he loved some Helen fair,  
And battling lost both land and town?  
Say, did he see his walls go down,  
Then choose from all his treasures there  
This one, and seek some other land?

## VII

The squirrels chatter'd in the leaves,  
The turkeys call'd from pawpaw wood,  
The deer with lifted nostrils stood,  
'Mid climbing blossoms sweet with bee,  
'Neath snow-white rose of Cherokee.

Then frosts hung ices on the eaves,  
Then cushion snows possess'd the ground,  
And so the seasons kept their round;  
Yet still old Morgan went and came  
From cabin door through forest dim,  
Through wold of snows, through wood of flame,  
Through golden Indian-summer days,  
Hung red with soft September haze,  
And no man cross'd or questioned him.

Nay, there was that in his stern air  
That held e'en these rude men aloof;  
None came to share the broad-built roof  
That rose so fortress-like beside

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

The angry, rushing, sullen tide,  
And only black men gather'd there,  
The old man's slaves in dull content,  
Black, silent, and obedient.

Then men push'd westward through his wood,  
His wild beasts fled, and now he stood  
Confronting men. He had endear'd  
No man, but still he went and came  
Apart, and shook his beard and strode  
His ways alone, and bore his load,  
If load it were, apart, alone.  
Then men grew busy with a name  
That no man loved, that many fear'd,  
And rude men stoop'd, and cast a stone,  
As at some statue overthrown.

Some said, a stolen bride was she,  
And that her lover from the sea  
Lay waiting for his chosen wife,  
And that a day of reckoning  
Lay waiting for this grizzled king.

Some said that looking from her place  
A love would sometimes light her face,  
As if sweet recollections stirr'd  
Like far, sweet songs that come to us,  
So soft, so sweet, they are not heard,  
So far, so faint, they fill the air,  
A fragrance falling anywhere.

So, wasting all her summer years  
That utter'd only through her tears,  
The seasons went, and still she stood  
Forever watching down the wood.

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

Yet in her heart there held a strife  
With all this wasting of sweet life,  
That none who have not lived—and died—  
Held up the two hands crucified  
Between two ways—can understand.

Men went and came, and still she stood  
In silence watching down the wood—  
Adown the wood beyond the land,  
Her hollow face upon her hand,  
Her black, abundant hair all down  
About her loose, ungather'd gown.

And what her thought? her life unsaid?  
Was it of love? of hate? of him,  
The tall, dark Southerner? Her head  
Bow'd down. The day fell dim  
Upon her eyes. She bowed, she slept.  
She waken'd then, and waking wept.

## VIII

The black-eyed bushy squirrels ran  
Like shadows scattered through the boughs;  
The gallant robin chirp'd his vows,  
The far-off pheasant thrumm'd his fan,  
A thousand blackbirds kept on wing  
In walnut-top, and it was Spring.

Old Morgan sat his cabin door,  
And one sat watching as of yore,  
But why turn'd Morgan's face as white  
As his white beard? A bird aflight,  
A squirrel peering through the trees,  
Saw some one silent steal away

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

Like darkness from the face of day,  
Saw two black eyes look back, and these  
Saw her hand beckon through the trees.

Ay! they have come, the sun-brown'd men,  
To beard old Morgan in his den.  
It matters little who they are,  
These silent men from isles afar;  
And truly no one cares or knows  
What be their merit or demand;  
It is enough for this rude land—  
At least, it is enough for those,  
The loud of tongue and rude of hand—  
To know that they are Morgan's foes.

Proud Morgan! More than tongue can tell  
He loved that woman watching there,  
That stood in her dark storm of hair,  
That stood and dream'd as in a spell,  
And look'd so fix'd and far away;  
And who that loveth woman well,  
Is wholly bad? be whom he may.

## IX

Ay! we have seen these Southern men,  
These sun-brown'd men from island shore,  
In this same land, and long before.  
They do not seem so lithe as then,  
They do not look so tall, and they  
Seem not so many as of old.  
But that same resolute and bold  
Expression of unbridled will,  
That even Time must half obey,  
Is with them and is of them still.

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

They do not counsel the decree  
Of court or council, where they drew  
Their breath, nor law nor order knew,  
Save but the strong hand of the strong;  
Where each stood up, avenged his wrong,  
Or sought his death all silently.  
They watch along the wave and wood,  
They heed, but haste not. Their estate,  
Whate'er it be, can bide and wait,  
Be it open ill or hidden good.  
No law for them! For they have stood  
With steel, and writ their rights in blood;  
And now, whatever 't is they seek,  
Whatever be their dark demand,  
Why, they will make it, hand to hand,  
Take time and patience: Greek to Greek.

### X

Like blown and snowy wintry pine,  
Old Morgan stoop'd his head and pass'd  
Within his cabin door. He cast  
A great arm out to men, made sign,  
Then turn'd to Sybal; stood beside  
A time, then turn'd and strode the floor,  
Stopp'd short, breathed sharp, threw wide the  
door,  
Then gazed beyond the murky tide,  
Past where the forky peaks divide.

He took his beard in his right hand,  
Then slowly shook his grizzled head  
And trembled, but no word he said.  
His thought was something more than pain;



## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

Upon the seas, upon the land  
He knew he should not rest again.

He turn'd to her ; and then once more  
Quick turn'd, and through the oaken door  
He sudden pointed to the west.  
His eye resumed its old command,  
The conversation of his hand  
It was enough ; she knew the rest.

He turn'd, he stoop'd, and smooth'd her hair,  
As if to smooth away the care  
From his great heart, with his left hand.  
His right hand hitch'd the pistol 'round  
That dangled at his belt. The sound  
Of steel to him was melody  
More sweet than any song of sea.  
He touch'd his pistol, push'd his lips,  
Then tapp'd it with his finger tips,  
And toy'd with it as harper's hand  
Seeks out the chords when he is sad  
And purposeless. At last he had  
Resolved. In haste he touch'd her hair,  
Made sign she should arise—prepare  
For some long journey, then again  
He look'd awest toward the plain ;  
Against the land of boundless space,  
The land of silences, the land  
Of shoreless deserts sown with sand,  
Where Desolation's dwelling is ;  
The land where, wondering, you say,  
What dried-up shoreless sea is this ?  
Where, wandering, from day to day  
You say, To-morrow sure we come  
To rest in some cool resting place,

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

And yet you journey on through space  
While seasons pass, and are struck dumb  
With marvel at the distances.

Yea, he would go. Go utterly  
Away, and from all living kind;  
Pierce through the distances, and find  
New lands. He had outlived his race.  
He stood like some eternal tree  
That tops remote Yosemite,  
And cannot fall. He turn'd his face  
Again and contemplated space.

And then he raised his hand to vex  
His beard, stood still, and there fell down  
Great drops from some unfrequent spring,  
And streak'd his channell'd cheeks sunbrown,  
And ran uncheck'd, as one who recks  
Nor joy, nor tears, nor anything.

And then, his broad breast heaving deep,  
Like some dark sea in troubled sleep,  
Blown round with groaning ships and wrecks,  
He sudden roused himself, and stood  
With all the strength of his stern mood,  
Then call'd his men, and bade them go  
And bring black steeds with banner'd necks,  
And strong, like burly buffalo.

## XI

The bronzen, stolid, still, black men  
Their black-maned horses silent drew  
Through solemn wood. One midnight when  
The curl'd moon tipp'd her horn, and threw

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

A black oak's shadow slant across  
A low mound hid in leaves and moss,  
Old Morgan cautious came and drew  
From out the ground, as from a grave,  
Great bags, all copper-bound and old,  
And fill'd, men say, with pirates' gold.  
And then they, silent as a dream,  
In long black shadow cross'd the stream.

### XII

And all was life at morn, but one,  
The tall old sea-king, grim and gray,  
Look'd back to where his cabin lay,  
And seem'd to hesitate. He rose  
At last, as from his dream's repose,  
From rest that counterfeited rest,  
And set his blown beard to the west;  
And rode against the setting sun,  
Far up the levels vast and dun.

His steeds were steady, strong and fleet,  
The best in all the wide west land,  
Their manes were in the air, their feet  
Seem'd scarce to touch the flying sand.

They rode like men gone mad, they fled  
All day and many days they ran,  
And in the rear a gray old man  
Kept watch, and ever turn'd his head  
Half eager and half angry, back  
Along their dusty desert track.

And she look'd back, but no man spoke,  
They rode, they swallowed up the plain;

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

The sun sank low, he look'd again,  
With lifted hand and shaded eyes.  
Then far, afar, he saw uprise,  
As if from giant's stride or stroke,  
Dun dust, like puffs of battle-smoke.

He turn'd, his left hand clutched the rein,  
He struck hard west his high right hand,  
His limbs were like the limbs of oak;  
All knew too well the man's command.  
On, on they spurred, they plunged again,  
And one look'd back, but no man spoke.

They climb'd the rock-built breasts of earth,  
The Titan-fronted, blowy steeps  
That cradled Time. Where freedom keeps  
Her flag of bright, blown stars unfurl'd,  
They climbed and climbed. They saw the birth  
Of sudden dawn upon the world;  
Again they gazed; they saw the face  
Of God, and named it boundless space.

And they descended and did roam  
Through levell'd distances set round  
By room. They saw the Silences  
Move by and beckon; saw the forms,  
The very beards, of burly storms,  
And heard them talk like sounding seas.  
On unnamed heights, bleak-blown and brown,  
And torn-like battlements of Mars,  
They saw the darknesses come down,  
Like curtains loosen'd from the dome  
Of God's cathedral, built of stars.

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

They pitch'd the tent where rivers run  
All foaming to the west, and rush  
As if to drown the falling sun.  
They saw the snowy mountains roll'd,  
And heaved along the nameless lands  
Like mighty billows; saw the gold  
Of awful sunsets; felt the hush  
Of heaven when the day sat down,  
And drew about his mantle brown,  
And hid his face in dusky hands.

The long and lonesome nights! the tent  
That nestled soft in sweep of grass,  
The hills against the firmament  
Where scarce the moving moon could pass;  
The cautious camp, the smother'd light,  
The silent sentinel at night!

The wild beasts howling from the hill;  
The savage prowling swift and still,  
And bended as a bow is bent.  
The arrow sent; the arrow spent  
And buried in its bloody place;  
The dead man lying on his face!

The clouds of dust, their cloud by day;  
Their pillar of unfailing fire  
The far North Star. And high, and higher,  
They climb'd so high it seemed eftsoon  
That they must face the falling moon,  
That like some flame-lit ruin lay  
High built before their weary way.

They learn'd to read the sign of storms,  
The moon's wide circles, sunset bars,

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

And storm-provoking blood and flame;  
And, like the Chaldean shepherds, came  
At night to name the moving stars.  
In heaven's face they pictured forms  
Of beasts, of fishes of the sea.  
They watch'd the Great Bear wearily  
Rise up and drag his clinking chain  
Of stars around the starry main.

### XIII

And why did these worn, sun-burnt men  
Let Morgan gain the plain, and then  
Pursue him ever where he fled?  
Some say their leader sought but her;  
Unlike each swarthy follower.  
Some say they sought his gold alone,  
And fear'd to make their quarrel known  
Lest it should keep its secret bed;  
Some say they thought to best prevail  
And conquer with united hands  
Alone upon the lonesome sands;  
Some say they had as much to dread;  
Some say—but I must tell my tale.

And still old Morgan sought the west;  
The sea, the utmost sea, and rest.  
He climb'd, descended, climb'd again,  
Until pursuit seemed all in vain;  
Until they left him all alone,  
As unpursued and as unknown,  
As some lost ship upon the main.

O there was grandeur in his air,  
An old-time splendor in his eye,

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

When he had climb'd at last the high  
And rock-built bastions of the plain,  
Thrown back his beard and blown white hair,  
And halting turn'd to look again.

Dismounting in his lofty place,  
He look'd far down the fading plain  
For his pursuers, but in vain.  
Yea, he was glad. Across his face  
A careless smile was seen to play,  
The first for many a stormy day.

He turn'd to Sybal, dark, yet fair  
As some sad twilight; touched her hair,  
Stoop'd low, and kiss'd her gently there,  
Then silent held her to his breast;  
Then waved command to his black men,  
Look'd east, then mounted slow and then  
Led leisurely against the west.

And why should he who dared to die,  
Who more than once with hissing breath  
Had set his teeth and pray'd for death?  
Why fled these men, or wherefore fly  
Before them now? why not defy?

His midnight men were strong and true,  
And not unused to strife, and knew  
The masonry of steel right well,  
And all such signs that lead to hell.

It might have been his youth had wrought  
Some wrongs his years would now repair,  
That made him fly and still forbear;  
It might have been he only sought

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

To lead them to some fatal snare,  
And let them die by piecemeal there.

I only know it was not fear  
Of any man or any thing  
That death in any shape might bring.  
It might have been some lofty sense  
Of his own truth and innocence,  
And virtues lofty as severe—  
Nay, nay! what room for reasons here?

And now they pierced a fringe of trees  
That bound a mountain's brow like bay.  
Sweet through the fragrant boughs a breeze  
Blew salt-flood freshness. Far away,  
From mountain brow to desert base  
Lay chaos, space; unbounded space.

The black men cried, "The sea!" They bow'd  
Black, woolly heads in hard black hands.  
They wept for joy. They laugh'd, they broke  
The silence of an age, and spoke  
Of rest at last; and, grouped in bands,  
They threw their long black arms about  
Each other's necks, and laugh'd aloud,  
Then wept again with laugh and shout.

Yet Morgan spake no word, but led  
His band with oft-averted head  
Right through the cooling trees, till he  
Stood out upon the lofty brow  
And mighty mountain wall. And now  
The men who shouted, "Lo, the sea!"  
Rode in the sun; sad, silently,  
Rode in the sun, and look'd below.



## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

They look'd but once, then look'd away,  
Then look'd each other in the face.  
They could not lift their brows, nor say,  
But held their heads, nor spake, for lo!  
Nor sea, nor voice of sea, nor breath  
Of sea, but only sand and death,  
The dread mirage, the fiend of space!

### XIV

Old Morgan eyed his men, look'd back  
Against the groves of tamarack,  
Then tapp'd his stirrup foot, and stray'd  
His broad left hand along the mane  
Of his strong steed, and careless play'd  
His fingers through the silken skein.

And then he spurr'd him to her side,  
And reach'd his hand and leaning wide,  
He smiling push'd her falling hair  
Back from her brow, and kiss'd her there.  
Yea, touch'd her softly, as if she  
Had been some priceless, tender flower;  
Yet touched her as one taking leave  
Of his one love in lofty tower  
Before descending to the sea  
Of battle on his battle eve.

A distant shout! quick oaths! alarms!  
The black men start, turn suddenly,  
Stand in the stirrup, clutch their arms,  
And bare bright arms all instantly.  
But he, he slowly turns, and he  
Looks all his full soul in her face.  
He does not shout, he does not say,

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

But sits serenely in his place  
A time, then slowly turns, looks back  
Between the trim-boughed tamarack,  
And up the winding mountain way,  
To where the long, strong grasses lay,  
And there they came, hot on his track!

He raised his glass in his two hands,  
Then in his left hand let it fall,  
Then seem'd to count his fingers o'er,  
Then reached his glass, waved his commands,  
Then tapped his stirrup as before,  
Stood in the stirrup stern and tall,  
Then ran a hand along the mane  
Half-nervous like, and that was all.

And then he turn'd, and smiled half sad,  
Half desperate, then hitch'd his steel;  
Then all his stormy presence had,  
As if he kept once more his keel,  
On pirate seas where breakers reel.

At last he tossed his iron hand  
Above the deep, steep desert space,  
Above the burning seas of sand,  
And look'd his black men in the face.  
They spake not, nor look'd back again,  
They struck the heel, they clutched the rein,  
And down the darkling plunging steep  
They dropp'd into the dried-up deep.

Below! It seem'd a league below,  
The black men rode, and she rode well,  
Against the gleaming, sheening haze  
That shone like some vast sea ablaze—

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

That seem'd to gleam, to glint, to glow,  
As if it mark'd the shores of hell.

Then Morgan reined alone, look'd back  
From off the high wall where he stood,  
And watch'd his fierce approaching foe.  
He saw him creep along his track,  
Saw him descending from the wood,  
And smiled to see how worn and slow.

And Morgan heard his oath and shout,  
And Morgan turned his head once more,  
And wheel'd his stout steed short about,  
Then seem'd to count their numbers o'er.  
And then his right hand touch'd his steel,  
And then he tapp'd his iron heel,  
And seemed to fight with thought. At last  
As if the final die was cast,  
And cast as carelessly as one  
Would toss a white coin in the sun,  
He touched his rein once more, and then  
His right hand laid with idle heed  
Along the toss'd mane of his steed.

Pursuer and pursued! who knows  
The why he left the breezy pine,  
The fragrant tamarack and vine,  
Red rose and precious yellow rose!  
Nay, Vasques held the vantage ground  
Above him by the wooded steep,  
And right nor left no passage lay,  
And there was left him but that way,—  
The way through blood, or to the deep  
And lonesome deserts far profound,  
That knew not sight of man, nor sound.

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

Hot Vasques reined upon the rim,  
High, bold, and fierce with crag and spire.  
He saw a far gray eagle swim,  
He saw a black hawk wheel, retire,  
And shun that desert's burning breath  
As shunning something more than death.

Ah, then he paused, turn'd, shook his head.  
"And shall we turn aside," he said,  
"Or dare this Death?" The men stood still  
As leaning on his sterner will.  
And then he stopp'd and turn'd again,  
And held his broad hand to his brow,  
And look'd intent and eagerly.  
The far white levels of the plain  
Flash'd back like billows. Even now  
He thought he saw rise up 'mid sea,  
'Mid space, 'mid wastes, 'mid nothingness  
A ship becalm'd as in distress.

The dim sign pass'd as suddenly,  
And then his eager eyes grew dazed,—  
He brought his two hands to his face.  
Again he raised his head, and gazed  
With flashing eyes and visage fierce  
Far out, and resolute to pierce  
The far, far, faint receding reach  
Of space and touch its farther beach.  
He saw but space, unbounded space;  
Eternal space and nothingness.

Then all wax'd anger'd as they gazed  
Far out upon the shoreless land,  
And clench'd their doubled hands and raised  
Their long bare arms, but utter'd not.

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

At last one rode from out the band,  
And raised his arm, push'd back his sleeve,  
Push'd bare his arm, rode up and down,  
With hat push'd back. Then flush'd and hot  
He shot sharp oaths like cannon shot.

Then Vasques was resolved ; his form  
Seem'd like a pine blown ramp't with storm.  
He clutch'd his rein, drove spur, and then  
Turn'd sharp and savage to his men,  
And then led boldly down the way  
To night that knows not night or day.

### XV

How broken plunged the steep descent !  
How barren ! Desolate, and rent  
By earthquake's shock, the land lay dead,  
With dust and ashes on its head.

'Twas as some old world overthrown  
Where Thesus fought and Sappho dream'd  
In æons ere they touch'd this land,  
And found their proud souls foot and hand  
Bound to the flesh and stung with pain.  
An ugly skeleton it seem'd  
Of its old self. The fiery rain  
Of red volcanoes here had sown  
The desolation of the plain.  
Ay, vanquish'd quite and overthrown,  
And torn with thunder-stroke, and strown  
With cinders, lo ! the dead earth lay  
As waiting for the judgment day.  
Why, tamer men had turn'd and said,  
On seeing this, with start and dread,

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## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

And whisper'd each with gather'd breath,  
"We come on the abode of death."

They wound below a savage bluff  
That lifted, from its sea-mark'd base,  
Great walls with characters cut rough  
And deep by some long-perish'd race;  
And great, strange beasts unnamed, unknown,  
Stood hewn and limn'd upon the stone.

A mournful land as land can be  
Beneath their feet in ashes lay,  
Beside that dread and dried-up sea;  
A city older than that gray  
And sand sown tower builded when  
Confusion cursed the tongues of men.

Beneath, before, a city lay  
That in her majesty had shamed  
The wolf-nursed conqueror of old;  
Below, before, and far away,  
There reach'd the white arm of a bay,  
A broad bay shrunk to sand and stone,  
Where ships had rode and breakers roll'd  
When Babylon was yet unnamed,  
And Nimrod's hunting-fields unknown.

Where sceptered kings had sat at feast  
Some serpents slid from out the grass  
That grew in tufts by shatter'd stone,  
Then hid beneath some broken mass  
That time had eaten as a bone  
Is eaten by some savage beast.

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

A dull-eyed rattlesnake that lay  
All loathsome, yellow-skinn'd, and slept,  
Coil'd tight as pine-knot, in the sun,  
With flat head through the center run,  
Struck blindly back, then rattling crept  
Flat-bellied down the dusty way . . .  
'Twas all the dead land had to say.

Two pink-eyed hawks, wide-wing'd and gray,  
Scream'd savagely, and, circling high,  
And screaming still in mad dismay,  
Grew dim and died against the sky . . .  
'Twas all the heavens had to say.

Some low-built junipers at last,  
The last that o'er the desert look'd,  
Where dumb owls sat with bent bills hook'd  
Beneath their wings awaiting night,  
Rose up, then faded from the sight.

What dim ghosts hover on this rim:  
What stately-manner'd shadows swim  
Along these gleaming wastes of sands  
And shoreless limits of dead lands?

Dread Azteckee! Dead Azteckee!  
White place of ghosts, give up thy dead;  
Give back to Time thy buried hosts!  
The new world's tawny Ishmaelite,  
The roving tent-born Shoshonee,  
Hath shunned thy shores of death, at night  
Because thou art so white, so dread,  
Because thou art so ghostly white,  
And named thy shores "the place of ghosts."

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

Thy white, uncertain sands are white  
With bones of thy unburied dead,  
That will not perish from the sight.  
They drown, but perish not—ah me!  
What dread unsightly sights are spread  
Along this lonesome, dried-up sea?

Old, hoar, and dried-up sea! so old  
So strown with wealth, so sown with gold!  
Yea, thou art old and hoary white  
With time, and ruin of all things;  
And on thy lonesome borders Night  
Sits brooding as with wounded wings.

The winds that toss'd thy waves and blew  
Across thy breast the blowing sail,  
And cheer'd the hearts of cheering crew  
From farther seas, no more prevail.  
Thy white-wall'd cities all lie prone,  
With but a pyramid, a stone,  
Set head and foot in sands to tell  
The thirsting stranger where they fell.

The patient ox that bended low  
His neck, and drew slow up and down  
Thy thousand freights through rock-built town  
Is now the free-born buffalo.  
No longer of the timid fold,  
The mountain ram leaps free and bold  
His high-built summit, and looks down  
From battlements of buried town.

Thine ancient steeds know not the rein;  
They lord the land; they come, they go  
At will; they laugh at man; they blow



## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

A cloud of black steeds o'er the plain.  
The winds, the waves, have drawn away—  
The very wild man dreads to stay.

### XVI

Away! upon the sandy seas  
The gleaming, burning, boundless plain;  
How solemn-like, how still, as when  
That mighty minded Genoese  
Drew three slim ships and led his men  
From land they might not meet again.

The black men rode in front by two,  
The fair one follow'd close, and kept  
Her face held down as if she wept;  
But Morgan kept the rear, and threw  
His flowing, swaying beard still back  
In watch along their lonesome track.

The weary Day fell down to rest,  
A star upon his mantled breast,  
Ere scarce the sun fell out of space,  
And Venus glimmer'd in his place.  
Yea, all the stars shone just as fair,  
And constellations kept their round,  
And look'd from out the great profound,  
And march'd, and countermarch'd, and shone  
Upon that desolation there—  
Why, just the same as if proud man  
Strode up and down array'd in gold  
And purple as in days of old,  
And reckon'd all of his own plan,  
Or made at least for man alone.

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

Yet on push'd Morgan silently,  
And straight as strong ship on a sea;  
And ever as he rode there lay—  
To right, to left, and in his way,  
Strange objects looming in the dark,  
Some like tall mast, or ark, or bark.

And things half-hidden in the sand  
Lay down before them where they pass'd—  
A broken beam, half-buried mast,  
A spar or bar, such as might be  
Blown crosswise, tumbled on the strand  
Of some sail-crowded, stormy sea.

All night by moon, by morning star,  
The still, black men still kept their way;  
All night till morn, till burning day  
Hard Vasques follow'd fast and far.

The sun is high, the sands are hot  
To touch, and all the tawny plain  
Sinks white and open as they tread  
And trudge, with half-averted head,  
As if to swallow them in sand.  
They look, as men look back to land  
When standing out to stormy sea,  
But still keep pace and murmur not;  
Keep stern and still as destiny.

It was a sight! A slim dog slid  
White-mouth'd and still along the sand,  
The pleading picture of distress.  
He stopp'd, leap'd up to lick a hand,  
A hard, black hand that sudden chid  
Him back, and check'd his tenderness.

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

Then when the black man turn'd his head,  
His poor, mute friend had fallen dead.

The very air hung white with heat,  
And white, and fair, and far away  
A lifted, shining snow-shaft lay  
As if to mock their mad retreat.  
The white, salt sands beneath their feet

Did make the black men loom as grand,  
From out the lifting, heaving heat,  
As they rode sternly on and on,  
As any bronze men in the land  
That sit their statue steeds upon.

The men were silent as men dead.  
The sun hung centered overhead,  
Nor seem'd to move. It molten hung  
Like some great central burner swung  
From lofty beams with golden bars  
In sacristy set round with stars.

Why, flame could hardly be more hot;  
Yet on the mad pursuer came  
Across the gleaming, yielding ground,  
Right on, as if he fed on flame,  
Right on until the mid-day found  
The man within a pistol-shot.

He hail'd, but Morgan answered not;  
He hail'd, then came a feeble shot,  
And strangely, in that vastness there,  
It seem'd to scarcely fret the air,  
But fell down harmless anywhere.

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

He fiercely hail'd ; and then there fell  
A horse. And then a man fell down,  
And in the sea-sand seem'd to drown.  
Then Vasques cursed, but scarce could tell  
The sound of his own voice, and all  
In mad confusion seem'd to fall.

Yet on pushed Morgan, silent on,  
And as he rode, he lean'd and drew  
From his catenas gold, and threw  
The bright coins in the glaring sun.  
But Vasques did not heed a whit,  
He scarcely deign'd to scowl at it.

Again lean'd Morgan. He uprose,  
And held a high hand to his foes,  
And held two goblets up, and one  
Did shine as if itself a sun.  
Then leaning backward from his place,  
He hurl'd them in his foeman's face ;  
Then drew again, and so kept on,  
Till goblets, gold, and all were gone.

Yea, strew'd all out upon the sands  
As men upon a frosty morn,  
In Mississippi's fertile lands,  
Hurl out great yellow ears of corn,  
To hungry swine with hurried hands.

Yet still hot Vasques urges on,  
With flashing eye and flushing cheek.  
What would he have? what does he seek?  
He does not heed the gold a whit,  
He does not deign to look at it ;  
But now his gleaming steel is drawn,

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

And now he leans, would hail again,—  
He opes his swollen lips in vain.

But look you! See! A lifted hand,  
And Vasques beckons his command.  
He cannot speak, he leans, and he  
Bends low upon his saddle-bow.  
And now his blade drops to his knee,  
And now he falters, now comes on,  
And now his head is bended low;  
And now his rein, his steel, is gone;  
Now faint as any child is he;  
And now his steed sinks to the knee.

The sun hung molten in mid-space,  
Like some great star fix'd in its place.  
From out the gleaming spaces rose  
A sheen of gossamer and danced,  
As Morgan slow and still advanced  
Before his far-receding foes.  
Right on, and on, the still, black line  
Drove straight through gleaming sand and shine,  
By spar and beam and mast, and stray  
And waif of sea and cast-away.

The far peaks faded from their sight,  
The mountain walls fell down like night,  
And nothing now was to be seen  
Except the dim sun hung in sheen  
Of gory garments all blood-red,—  
The hell beneath, the hell o'erhead.

A black man tumbled from his steed.  
He clutch'd in death the moving sands,  
He caught the hot earth in his hands,

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

He gripp'd it, held it hard and grim—  
The great, sad mother did not heed  
His hold, but pass'd right on from him.

### XVII

The sun seem'd broken loose at last.  
And settled slowly to the west,  
Half-hidden as he fell to rest,  
Yet, like the flying Parthian, cast  
His keenest arrows as he pass'd.

On, on, the black men slowly drew  
Their length like some great serpent through  
The sands, and left a hollow'd groove:  
They moved, they scarcely seem'd to move.  
How patient in their muffled tread!  
How like the dead march of the dead!

At last the slow, black line was check'd,  
An instant only; now again  
It moved, it falter'd now, and now  
It settled in its sandy bed,  
And steeds stood rooted to the plain.  
Then all stood still, and men somehow  
Look'd down and with averted head;  
Look'd down, nor dared looked up, nor reck'd  
Of anything, of ill or good,  
But bow'd and stricken still, they stood.

Like some brave band that dared the fierce  
And bristled steel of gather'd host,  
These daring men had dared to pierce  
This awful vastness, dead and gray.

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

And now at last brought well at bay  
They stood,—but each stood to his post.

Then one dismounted, waved a hand,  
'Twas Morgan's stern and still command.  
There fell a clank, like loosen'd chain,  
As men dismounting loosed the rein.

Then every steed stood loosed and free;  
And some stepp'd slow and mute aside,  
And some sank to the sands and died;  
And some stood still as shadows be.

Old Morgan turn'd and raised his hand  
And laid it level with his eyes,  
And looked far back along the land.  
He saw a dark dust still uprise,  
Still surely tend to where he lay.  
He did not curse, he did not say—  
He did not even look surprise.

Nay, he was over-gentle now;  
He wiped a time his Titan brow,  
Then sought dark Sybal in her place,  
Put out his arms, put down his face  
And look'd in hers. She reach'd her hands,  
She lean'd, she fell upon his breast;  
He reach'd his arms around; she lay  
As lies a bird in leafy nest.  
And he look'd out across the sands  
And bearing her, he strode away.

Some black men settled down to rest,  
But none made murmur or request.  
The dead were dead, and that were best;

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

The living, leaning, follow'd him,  
A long dark line, a shadow dim.

The day through high mid-heaven rode  
Across the sky, the dim, red day;  
And on, the war-like day-god strode  
With shoulder'd shield away, away.  
The savage, war-like day bent low,  
As reapers bend in gathering grain,  
As archer bending bends yew bow,  
And flush'd and fretted as in pain.

Then down his shoulder slid his shield,  
So huge, so awful, so blood-red  
And batter'd as from battle-field:  
It settled, sunk to his left hand,  
Sunk down and down, it touch'd the sand;  
Then day along the land lay dead,  
Without one candle, foot or head.

And now the moon wheel'd white and vast,  
A round, unbroken, marbled moon,  
And touch'd the far, bright buttes of snow,  
Then climb'd their shoulders over soon;  
And there she seem'd to sit at last,  
To hang, to hover there, to grow,  
Grow grander than vast peaks of snow.

She sat the battlements of time;  
She shone in mail of frost and rime  
A time, and then rose up and stood  
In heaven in sad widowhood.

The faded moon fell wearily,  
And then the sun right suddenly



## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

Rose up full arm'd, and rushing came  
Across the land like flood of flame.

And now it seemed that hills uprose,  
High push'd against the arching skies,  
As if to meet the sudden sun—  
Rose sharp from out the sultry dun,  
And seem'd to hold the free repose  
Of lands where flow'ry summits rise,  
In unfenced fields of Paradise.

The black men look'd up from the sands  
Against the dim, uncertain skies,  
As men that disbelieved their eyes,  
And would have laugh'd; they wept instead,  
With shoulders heaved, with bowing head  
Hid down between the two black hands.

They stood and gazed. Lo! like the call  
Of spring-time promises, the trees  
Lean'd from their lifted mountain wall,  
And stood clear cut against the skies,  
As if they grew in pistol-shot;  
Yet all the mountains answer'd not,  
And yet there came no cooling breeze,  
Nor soothing sense of wind-wet trees.

At last old Morgan, looking through  
His shaded fingers, let them go,  
And let his load fall down as dead.  
He groan'd, he clutch'd his beard of snow  
As was his wont, then bowing low,  
Took up his life, and moaning said,  
"Lord Christ! 'tis the mirage, and we  
Stand blinded in a burning sea."

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

### XVIII

Again they move, but where or how  
It recks them little, nothing now.  
Yet Morgan leads them as before,  
But totters now; he bends, and he  
Is like a broken ship a-sea,—  
A ship that knows not any shore,  
Nor rudder, nor shall anchor more.

Some leaning shadows crooning crept  
Through desolation, crown'd in dust.  
And had the mad pursuer kept  
His path, and cherish'd his pursuit?  
There lay no choice. Advance, he must:  
Advance, and eat his ashen fruit.

Again the still moon rose and stood  
Above the dim, dark belt of wood,  
Above the buttes, above the snow,  
And bent a sad, sweet face below.  
She reach'd along the level plain  
Her long, white fingers. Then again  
She reach'd, she touch'd the snowy sands.  
Then reach'd far out until she touch'd  
A heap that lay with doubled hands,  
Reach'd from its sable self, and clutch'd  
With patient death. O tenderly  
That black, that dead and hollow face  
Was kiss'd that night. . . . What if I say  
The long, white moonbeams reaching there,  
Caressing idle hands of clay,  
And resting on the wrinkled hair  
And great lips push'd in sullen pout,

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

Were God's own fingers reaching out  
From heaven to that lonesome place?

### XIX

By waif and stray and cast-away,  
Such as are seen in seas withdrawn,  
Old Morgan led in silence on;  
And sometimes lifting up his head,  
To guide his footsteps as he led,  
He deem'd he saw a great ship lay  
Her keel along the sea-wash'd sand,  
As with her captain's old command.

The stars were seal'd; and then a haze  
Of gossamer fill'd all the west,  
So like in Indian summer days,  
And veil'd all things. And then the moon  
Grew pale and faint, and far. She died,  
And now nor star nor any sign  
Fell out of heaven. Oversoon  
A black man fell. Then at his side  
Some one sat down to watch, to rest—  
To rest, to watch, or what you will,  
The man sits resting, watching still.

### XX

The day glared through the eastern rim  
Of rocky peaks, as prison bars,  
With light as dim as distant stars.  
The sultry sunbeams filter'd down  
Through misty phantoms weird and dim,  
Through shifting shapes bat-wing'd and brown.

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

Like some vast ruin wrapp'd in flame  
The sun fell down before them now.  
Behind them wheel'd white peaks of snow,  
As they proceeded. Gray and grim  
And awful objects went and came  
Before them all. They pierced at last  
The desert's middle depths, and lo!  
There loom'd from out the desert vast  
A lonely ship, well-built and trim,  
And perfect all in hull and mast.

No storm had stain'd it any whit,  
No seasons set their teeth in it.  
Her masts were white as ghosts, and tall;  
Her decks were as of yesterday.  
The rains, the elements, and all  
The moving things that bring decay  
By fair green lands or fairer seas,  
Had touch'd not here for centuries.  
Lo! date had lost all reckoning,  
And time had long forgotten all  
In this lost land, and no new thing  
Or old could anywise befall,  
For Time went by the other way.

What dreams of gold or conquest drew  
The oak-built sea-king to these seas,  
Ere earth, old earth, unsatisfied,  
Rose up and shook man in disgust  
From off her wearied breast, and threw  
His high-built cities down, and dried  
These unnamed ship-sown seas to dust?  
Who trod these decks? What captain knew  
The straits that led to lands like these?

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

Blew south-sea breeze or north-sea breeze?  
What spiced-winds whistled through this sail?  
What banners stream'd above these seas?  
And what strange seaman answer'd back  
To other sea-king's beck and hail,  
That blew across his foamy track?

Sought Jason here the golden fleece?  
Came Trojan ship or ships of Greece?  
Came decks dark-mann'd from sultry Ind,  
Woo'd here by spacious wooing wind?  
So like a grand, sweet woman, when  
A great love moves her soul to men?

Came here strong ships of Solomon  
In quest of Ophir by Cathay? . . . .  
Sit down and dream of seas withdrawn,  
And every sea-breath drawn away.  
Sit down, sit down! What is the good  
That we go on still fashioning  
Great iron ships or walls of wood,  
High masts of oak, or anything?

Lo! all things moving must go by.  
The seas lie dead. Behold, this land  
Sits desolate in dust beside  
His snow-white, seamless shroud of sand;  
The very clouds have wept and died,  
And only God is in the sky.

## XXI

The sands lay heaved, as heaved by waves,  
As fashioned in a thousand graves:  
And wrecks of storm blown here and there,

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

And dead men scatter'd everywhere;  
And strangely clad they seem'd to be  
Just as they sank in that dread sea.

The mermaid with her golden hair  
Had clung about a wreck's beam there,  
And sung her song of sweet despair,  
The time she saw the seas withdrawn  
And all her pride and glory gone:  
Had sung her melancholy dirge  
Above the last receding surge,  
And, looking down the rippled tide,  
Had sung, and with her song had died.

The monsters of the sea lay bound  
In strange contortions. Coil'd around  
A mast half heaved above the sand  
The great sea-serpent's folds were found,  
As solid as ship's iron band;  
And basking in the burning sun  
There rose the great whale's skeleton.

A thousand sea things stretch'd across  
Their weary and bewilder'd way:  
Great unnamed monsters wrinkled lay  
With sunken eyes and shrunken form.  
The strong sea-horse that rode the storm  
With mane as light and white as floss,  
Lay tangled in his mane of moss.

And anchor, hull, and cast-away,  
And all things that the miser deep  
Doth in his darkling locker keep,  
To right and left around them lay.  
Yea, golden coin and golden cup,

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

And golden cruse, and golden plate,  
And all that great seas swallow up,  
Right in their dreadful pathway lay.  
The hoary sea made white with time,  
And wrinkled cross with many a crime,  
With all his treasured thefts lay there,  
His sins, his very soul laid bare,  
As if it were the Judgment Day.

### XXII

And now the tawny night fell soon,  
And there was neither star nor moon;  
And yet it seem'd it was not night.  
There fell a phosphorescent light,  
There rose from white sands and dead men  
A soft light, white and strange as when  
The Spirit of Jehovah moved  
Upon the water's conscious face,  
And made it His abiding place.

Remote, around the lonesome ship,  
Old Morgan moved, but knew it not,  
For neither star nor moon fell down. . . .  
I trow that was a lonesome spot  
He found, where boat and ship did dip  
In sands like some half-sunken town.

At last before the leader lay  
A form that in the night did seem  
A slain Goliath. As in a dream,  
He drew aside in his slow pace,  
And look'd. He saw a sable face!  
A friend that fell that very day,  
Thrown straight across his wearied way.

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

He falter'd now. His iron heart,  
That never yet refused its part,  
Began to fail him; and his strength  
Shook at his knees, as shakes the wind  
A shatter'd ship. His shatter'd mind  
Ranged up and down the land. At length  
He turn'd, as ships turn, tempest toss'd,  
For now he knew that he was lost!  
He sought in vain the moon, the stars,  
In vain the battle-star of Mars.

Again he moved. And now again  
He paused, he peer'd along the plain,  
Another form before him lay.  
He stood, and statue-white he stood,  
He trembled like a stormy wood,—  
It was a foeman brawn and gray.

He lifted up his head again,  
Again he search'd the great profound  
For moon, for star, but sought in vain.  
He kept his circle round and round  
The great ship lifting from the sand,  
And pointing heavenward like a hand.

And still he crept along the plain,  
Yet where his foeman dead again  
Lay in his way he moved around,  
And soft as if on sacred ground,  
And did not touch him anywhere.  
It might have been he had a dread,  
In his half-crazed and fever'd brain,  
His fallen foe might rise again  
If he should dare to touch him there.



## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

He circled round the lonesome ship  
Like some wild beast within a wall,  
That keeps his paces round and round.  
The very stillness had a sound ;  
He saw strange somethings rise and dip ;  
He felt the weirdness like a pall  
Come down and cover him. It seem'd  
To take a form, take many forms,  
To talk to him, to reach out arms ;  
Yet on he kept, and silent kept,  
And as he lead he lean'd and slept,  
And as he slept he talk'd and dream'd.

Two shadows follow'd, stopp'd, and stood  
Bewilder'd, wander'd back again,  
Came on and then fell to the sand,  
And sinking died. Then other men  
Did wag their woolly heads and laugh,  
Then bend their necks and seem to quaff  
Of cooling waves that careless flow  
Where woods and long, strong grasses grow.

Yet on wound Morgan, leaning low,  
With her upon his breast, and slow  
As hand upon a dial plate.  
He did not turn his course or quail,  
He did not falter, did not fail,  
Turn right or left or hesitate.

Some far-off sounds had lost their way,  
And seem'd to call to him and pray  
For help, as if they were affright.  
It was not day, it seem'd not night,  
But that dim land that lies between  
The mournful, faithful face of night,

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

And loud and gold-bedazzled day;  
A night that was not felt but seen.

There seem'd not now the ghost of sound,  
He stepp'd as soft as step the dead;  
Yet on he lead in solemn tread,  
Bewilder'd, blinded, round and round,  
About the great black ship that rose  
Tall-masted as that ship that blows  
Her ghost below lost Panama,—  
The tallest mast man ever saw.

Two leaning shadows follow'd him:  
Their eyes were red, their teeth shone white,  
Their limbs did lift as shadows swim.  
Then one went left and one went right,  
And in the night pass'd out of sight;  
Pass'd through the portals black, unknown,  
And Morgan totter'd on alone.

And why he still survived the rest,  
Why still he had the strength to stir,  
Why still he stood like gnarlèd oak  
That buffets storm and tempest stroke,  
One cannot say, save but for her,  
That helpless being on his breast.

She did not speak, she did not stir;  
In rippled currents over her,  
Her black, abundant hair pour'd down  
Like mantle or some sable gown.  
That sad, sweet dreamer; she who knew  
Not anything of earth at all,  
Nor cared to know its bane or bliss;  
That dove that did not touch the land,

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

That knew, yet did not understand.  
And this may be because she drew  
Her all of life right from the hand  
Of God, and did not choose to learn  
The things that make up man's concern.

Ah! there be souls none understand;  
Like clouds, they cannot touch the land.  
Unanchored ships, they blow and blow,  
Sail to and fro, and then go down  
In unknown seas that none shall know,  
Without one ripple of renown.

Call these not fools; the test of worth  
Is not the hold you have of earth.  
Ay, there be gentlest souls sea-blown  
That know not any harbor known.  
Now it may be the reason is,  
They touch on fairer shores than this.

At last he touch'd a fallen group,  
Dead fellows tumbled in the sands,  
Dead foemen, gather'd to their dead.  
And eager now the man did stoop,  
Lay down his load and reach his hands,  
And stretch his form and look steadfast  
And frightful, and as one aghast.  
He lean'd, and then he raised his head,  
And look'd for Vasques, but in vain  
He peer'd along the deadly plain.

Now, from the night another face  
The last that follow'd through the deep,  
Comes on, falls dead within a pace.  
Yet Vasques still survives! But where?

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

His last bold follower lies there,  
Thrown straight across old Morgan's track,  
As if to check him, bid him back.  
He stands, he does not dare to stir,  
He watches by his charge asleep,  
He fears for her: but only her.  
The man who ever mock'd at death,  
He only dares to draw his breath.

### XXIII

Beyond, and still as black despair,  
A man rose up, stood dark and tall,  
Stretch'd out his neck, reach'd forth, let fall  
Dark oaths, and Death stood waiting there.

A tawny dead man stretch'd between,  
And Vasques set his foot thereon.  
The stars were seal'd, the moon was gone,  
The very darkness cast a shade.  
The scene was rather heard than seen,  
The rattle of a single blade. . . .

A right foot rested on the dead,  
A black hand reach'd and clutch'd a beard,  
Then neither pray'd, nor dream'd of hope.  
A fierce face reach'd, a black face peer'd. . .  
No bat went whirling overhead,  
No star fell out of Ethiope.

The dead man lay between them there,  
The two men glared as tigers glare,—  
The black man held him by the beard.  
He wound his hand, he held him fast,  
And tighter held, as if he fear'd

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

The man might 'scape him at the last.  
Whiles Morgan did not speak or stir,  
But stood in silent watch with her.

Not long. . . . A light blade lifted, thrust,  
A blade that leapt and swept about,  
So wizard-like, like wand in spell,  
So like a serpent's tongue thrust out. . . .  
Thrust twice, thrust thrice, thrust as he fell,  
Thrust through until it touched the dust.

Yet ever as he thrust and smote,  
A black hand like an iron band  
Did tighten round a gasping throat.  
He fell, but did not loose his hand;  
The two lay dead upon the sand.

Lo! up and from the fallen forms  
Two ghosts came, dark as gathered storms;  
Two gray ghosts stood, then looking back;  
With hands all empty, and hands clutch'd,  
Strode on in silence. Then they touch'd,  
Along the lonesome, chartless track,  
Where dim Plutonian darkness fell,  
Then touch'd the outer rim of hell;  
And looking back their great despair  
Sat sadly down, as resting there.

## XXIV

As if there was a strength in death  
The battle seem'd to nerve the man  
To superhuman strength. He rose,  
Held up his head, began to scan  
The heavens and to take his breath

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

Right strong and lustily. He now  
Resumed his part, and with his eye  
Fix'd on a star that filter'd through  
The farther west, push'd bare his brow,  
And kept his course with head held high,  
As if he strode his deck and drew  
His keel below some lofty light  
That watch'd the rocky reef at night.

How lone he was, how patient she  
Upon that lonesome sandy sea!  
It were a sad, unpleasant sight  
To follow them through all the night,  
Until the time they lifted hand,  
And touch'd at last a water'd land.

\* \* \* \* \*

The turkeys walk'd the tangled grass,  
And scarcely turn'd to let them pass.  
There was no sign of man, nor sign  
Of savage beast. 'Twas so divine,  
It seem'd as if the bended skies  
Were rounded for this Paradise.

The large-eyed antelope came down  
From off their windy hills, and blew  
Their whistles as they wander'd through  
The open groves of water'd wood;  
They came as light as if on wing,  
And reached their noses wet and brown  
And stamp'd their little feet and stood  
Close up before them, wondering.

What if this were that Eden old,  
They found in this heart of the new

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

And unnamed westmost world of gold,  
Where date and history had birth,  
And man began first wandering  
To go the girdle of the earth,  
And find the beautiful and true?

It lies a little isle mid land,  
An island in a sea of sand;  
With reedy waters and the balm  
Of an eternal summer air;  
Some blowy pines toss here and there;  
And there are grasses long and strong,  
And tropic fruits that never fail:  
The Manzanita pulp, the palm,  
The prickly pear, with all the song  
Of summer birds. And there the quail  
Makes nest, and you may hear her call  
All day from out the chaparral.

A land where white man never trod,  
And Morgan seems some demi-god,  
That haunts the red man's spirit land.  
A land where never red man's hand  
Is lifted up in strife at all,  
But holds it sacred unto those  
Who bravely fell before their foes,  
And rarely dares its desert wall.

Here breaks nor sound of strife nor sign;  
Rare times a chieftain comes this way,  
Alone, and battle-scar'd and gray,  
And then he bends devout before  
The maid who keeps the cabin-door,  
And deems her something all divine.

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

Within the island's heart 'tis said,  
Tall trees are bending down with bread,  
And that a fountain pure as Truth,  
And deep and mossy-bound and fair,  
Is bubbling from the forest there,—  
Perchance the fabled fount of youth!  
An isle where skies are ever fair,  
Where men keep never date nor day,  
Where Time has thrown his glass away.

This isle is all their own. No more  
The flight by day, the watch by night.  
Dark Sybal twines about the door  
The scarlet blooms, the blossoms white  
And winds red berries in her hair,  
And never knows the name of care.

She has a thousand birds; they blow  
In rainbow clouds, in clouds of snow;  
The birds take berries from her hand;  
They come and go at her command.

She has a thousand pretty birds,  
That sing her summer songs all day;  
Small, black-hoof'd antelope in herds,  
And squirrels bushy-tail'd and gray,  
With round and sparkling eyes of pink,  
And cunning-faced as you can think.

She has a thousand busy birds:  
And is she happy in her isle,  
With all her feather'd friends and herds?  
For when has Morgan seen her smile?



## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

She has a thousand cunning birds,  
They would build nestings in her hair,  
She has brown antelope in herds;  
She never knows the name of care;  
Why, then, is she not happy there?

All patiently she bears her part;  
She has a thousand birdlings there,  
These birds they would build in her hair;  
But not one bird builds in her heart.

She has a thousand birds; yet she  
Would give ten thousand cheerfully,  
All bright of plume and clear of tongue,  
And sweet as ever trilled or sung,  
For one small flutter'd bird to come  
And build within her heart, though dumb.

She has a thousand birds; yet one  
Is lost, and, lo! she is undone.  
She sighs sometimes. She looks away,  
And yet she does not weep or say.

"The Ship in the Desert" was first published in London—  
Chapman and Hall, 1876. It was nearly twice its present length  
and was dedicated TO MY PARENTS IN OREGON, as follows:

With deep reverence I inscribe these lines, my dear parents,  
to you. I see you now, away beyond the seas—beyond the lands  
where the sun goes down in the Pacific like some great ship of  
fire, resting still on the green hills, waiting

"Where rolls the Oregon  
And hears no sound save its own dashing." 1  
1  
2

Nearly a quarter of a century ago you took me the long and  
lonesome half-year's journey across the mighty continent, wild  
and rent and broken up and sown with sand and ashes and  
crossed by tumbling wooded rivers that ran as if glad to get

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

away, fresh and strange and new, as if but half-fashioned from the hand of God. All the time as I tread this strange land I re-live those scenes, and you are with me. How dark and deep, how sullen, strong and lionlike the mighty Missouri rolled between his walls of untracked wood and cleft the unknown domain of the middle world before us! Then the frail and buffeted rafts on the river, the women and children huddled together, the shouts of the brawny men as they swam with the bellowing cattle, the cows in the stormy stream eddying, whirling, spinning about, calling to their young, their bright horns shining in the sun. The wild men waiting on the other side; painted savages, leaning on their bows, despising our weakness, opening a way, letting us pass on to the unknown distances, where they said the sun and moon lay down together and brought forth the stars. The long and winding lines of wagons, the graves by the wayside, the women weeping together as they passed on. Then hills, then plains, parched lands like Syria, dust and alkali, cold streams with woods, camps by night, great wood fires in circles, tents in the center like Caesar's battle camps, painted men that passed like shadows, showers of arrows, the wild beasts howling from the hills. You, my dear parents, will pardon the thread of fiction on which I have strung these scenes and descriptions of a mighty land of mystery, and wild and savage grandeur, for the world will have its way, and, like a spoiled child, demands a tale—

“Yea,

We who toil and earn our bread, still have our masters.”

A ragged and broken story it is, with long deserts, with alkali and ashes, yet it may, like the land it deals of, have some green places, and woods and running waters, where you can rest.

Three times now I have ranged the great West in fancy, as I did in fact for twenty years and gathered unknown and unnamed blossoms from mountain top, from desert land, where man never ranged before, and asked the West to receive my weeds, my grasses and blue-eyed blossoms. But here it ends. Good or bad, I have done enough of this work on the border. The Orient promises a more grateful harvest. I have been true to my West. She has been my only love. I have remembered her greatness. I have done my work to show to the world her vastness, her riches, her resources, her valor and her dignity, her poetry and her grandeur. Yet while I was going on working so in silence, what were the things she said of me? But let that

## THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

---

pass, my dear parents. Others will come after us. Possibly I have blazed out the trail for great minds over this field, as you did across the deserts and plains for great men a quarter of a century ago.

JOAQUIN MILLER.

LAKE COMO, ITALY.

I had bought land near Naples, where I wrote most of this, along with a young Englishman intending to settle down there; but we both were stricken with malarial fever; he died, and I, broken and sick at heart for my mountains, finally came home.

The author of *Cleopatra*, a man of great and varied endowments, laid a strong hand to the fashioning of this poem, and in return I made mention of his Sybals and Semiramis. We knew, in Rome, and loved much the woman herein described. In truth, I never created any one of my men or women or scenes entirely.

As for the story of the ship in the desert, it is old, old. You can see the tide marks of an ocean even from your car window as you glide around Salt Lake, hundreds of feet up the steeps. The mighty Colorado Cañon was made by the breaking away of this ocean, you find oyster shells and petrified salt water fish in the Rocky Mountains, and a ship in the desert is quite in line with these facts.

The body of this poem was first published in the *Atlantic Monthly*. The purpose of it was the same as induced the Isles of the Amazons, but the work is better because more true and nearer to the heart. Bear in mind it was done when the heart of the continent was indeed a desert, or at least a wilderness. How much or how little it may have had to do in bringing Europe this way to seek for the lost Edens, and to make the desert blossom as the rose, matters nothing now; but, "He hath brought many captives home to Rome whose ransom did the generous coffers fill."

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

### PART I

*Primeval forests! virgin sod!  
That Saxon has not ravish'd yet,  
Lo! peak on peak in stairways set—  
In stepping stairs that reach to God!*

*Here we are free as sea or wind,  
For here are set Time's snowy tents  
In everlasting battlements  
Against the march of Saxon mind.*

Far up in the hush of the Amazon River,  
And mantled and hung in the tropical trees,  
There are isles as grand as the isles of seas.  
And the waves strike strophes, and keen reeds  
quiver,  
As the sudden canoe shoots past them and over  
The strong, still tide to the opposite shore,  
Where the blue-eyed men by the sycamore  
Sit mending their nets 'neath the vine-twined  
cover;

Sit weaving the threads of long, strong grasses;  
They wind and they spin on the clumsy wheel,  
Into hammocks red-hued with the cochineal,  
To trade with the single black ship that passes,  
With foreign old freightage of curious old store,  
And still and slow as if half asleep,—  
A cunning old trader that loves to creep  
Cautious and slow in the shade of the shore.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

---

And the blue-eyed men that are mild as the  
dawns—

Oh, delicate dawns of the grand Andes!  
Lift up soft eyes that are deep like seas,  
And mild yet wild as the red-white fawns';

And they gaze into yours, then weave, then  
listen,  
Then look in wonder, then again weave on,  
Then again look wonder that your are not  
gone,  
While the keen reeds quiver and the bent waves  
glisten;

But they say no word while they weave and  
wonder,  
Though they sometimes sing, voiced low like  
the dove,  
And as deep and as rich as their tropical love,  
A-weaving their net threads through and under.

A pure, true people you may trust are these  
That weave their threads where the quick  
leaves quiver;  
And this is their tale of the Isles of the river,  
And the why that their eyes are so blue like  
seas:

The why that the men draw water and bear  
The wine or the water in the wild boar skin,  
And do hew the wood and weave and spin,  
And so bear with the women full burthen and  
share.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

A curious old tale of a curious old time,  
That is told you betimes by a quaint old crone,  
Who sits on the rim of an island alone,  
As ever was told you in story or rhyme.

Her brown, bare feet dip down to the river,  
And dabble and splash to her monotone,  
As she holds in her hands a strange green  
stone,  
And talks to the boat where the bent reeds  
quiver.

And the quaint old crone has a singular way  
Of holding her head to the side and askew,  
And smoothing the stone in her palms all day  
As saying "I've nothing at all for you,"  
Until you have anointed her palm, and you  
Have touched on the delicate spring of a door  
That silver has opened perhaps before;  
For woman is woman the wide world through.

The old near truth on the far new shore,  
I bought and I paid for it; so did you;  
The tale may be false or the tale may be true;  
I give it as I got it, and who can more?

If I have made journeys to difficult shores,  
And woven delusions in innocent verse,  
If none be the wiser, why, who is the worse?  
The field it was mine, the fruit it is yours.

A sudden told tale. You may read as you run.  
A part of it hers, some part is my own,  
Crude, and too carelessly woven and sown,  
As I sail'd on the Mexican seas in the sun.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

---

'Twas nations ago, when the Amazons were,  
That a fair young knight—says the quaint old  
    crone,  
With her head sidewise, as she smooths at the  
    stone—  
Came over the seas, with his golden hair,  
And a great black steed, and glittering spurs,  
    With a woman's face, with a manly frown,  
    A heart as tender and as true as hers,  
And a sword that had come from crusaders  
    down.

And fairest, and foremost in love as in war  
    Was the brave young knight of the brave old  
    days.  
Of all the knights, with their knightly ways,  
That had journey'd away to this world afar  
In the name of Spain; of the splendid few  
    Who bore her banner in the new-born world,  
    From the sea rim up to where clouds are  
    curl'd,  
And condors beat with black wings the blue.

He was born, says the crone, where the brave  
    are fair,  
And blown from the banks of the Guadal-  
    quiver,  
And yet blue-eyed, with the Celt's soft hair,  
    With never a drop of the dark deep river  
Of Moorish blood that had swept through Spain,  
And plash'd the world with its tawny stain.

He sat on his steed, and his sword was bloody  
    With heathen blood: the battle was done;  
His heart rebelled and rose with pity.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

---

For crown'd with fire, wreathed and ruddy  
Fell antique temples built up to the sun.  
Below on the plain lay the burning city  
At the conqueror's feet; the red street strown  
With dead, with gold, and with gods over-  
thrown.

And the heathen pour'd, in a helpless flood,  
With never a wail and with never a blow,  
At last, to even provoke a foe,  
Through gateways, wet with the pagan's blood.

"Ho, forward! smite!" but the minstrel linger'd,  
He reach'd his hand and he touch'd the rein,  
He humm'd an air, and he toy'd and finger'd  
The arching neck and the glossy mane.

He rested the heel, he rested the hand,  
Though the thing was death to the man to  
dare  
To doubt, to question, to falter there,  
Nor heeded at all to the hot command.

He wiped his steel on his black steed's mane,  
He sheathed it deep, then look'd at the sun,  
Then counted his comrades, one by one,  
With booty returning from the plunder'd plain.

He lifted his face to the flashing snow,  
He lifted his shield of steel as he sang,  
And he flung it away till it clang'd and rang  
On the granite rocks in the plain below.



## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

He cross'd his bosom. Made overbold,  
He lifted his voice and sang, quite low  
At first, then loud in the long ago,  
When the loves endured though the days grew  
old.

They heard his song, the chief on the plain  
Stood up in his stirrups, and, sword in hand,  
He cursed and he call'd with a loud com-  
mand  
To the blue-eyed boy to return again;  
To lift his shield again to the sky,  
And come and surrender his sword or die.

He wove his hand in the stormy mane,  
He lean'd him forward, he lifted the rein,  
He struck the flank, he wheel'd and sprang,  
And gaily rode in the face of the sun,  
And bared his sword and he bravely sang,  
"Ho! come and take it!" but there came not  
one.

And so he sang with his face to the south:  
"I shall go; I shall search for the Amazon  
shore,  
Where the curses of man they are heard no  
more,  
And kisses alone shall embrace the mouth.

"I shall journey in search of the Incan Isles,  
Go far and away to traditional land,  
Where love is queen in a crown of smiles,  
And battle has never imbrued a hand;

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

---

"Where man has never despoil'd or trod;  
Where woman's hand with a woman's heart  
Has fashion'd an Eden from man apart,  
And walks in her garden alone with God.

"I shall find that Eden, and all my years  
Shall sit and repose, shall sing in the sun;  
And the tides may rest or the tides may run,  
And men may water the world with tears;

"And the years may come and the years may go,  
And men make war, may slay and be slain,  
But I not care, for I never shall know  
Of man, or of aught that is man's again.

"The waves may battle, the winds may blow,  
The mellow rich moons may ripen and fall,  
The seasons of gold they may gather or go,  
The mono may chatter, the paroquet call,  
And I shall not heed, take note, or know,  
If the Fates befriend, or if ill befall,  
Of worlds without or of worlds at all,  
Of heaven above, or of hadès below."

'Twas the song of a dream and the dream of a  
singer,  
Drawn fine as the delicate fibers of gold,  
And broken in two by the touch of a finger,  
And blown as the winds blow, rent and roll'd  
In dust, and spent as a tale that is told.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

Alas! for his dreams and the songs he sung;  
The beasts beset him; the serpents they hung,;  
Red-tongued and terrible, over his head.  
He clove and he thrust with his keen, quick  
steel,  
He coax'd with his hand, he urged with his  
heel,  
Till his steel was broken, and his steed lay dead.

He toil'd to the river, he lean'd intent  
To the wave, and away to the islands fair,  
From beasts that pursued, and he breathed a  
prayer;  
For soul and body were well-nigh spent.

'Twas the king of rivers, and the Isles were near;  
Yet it moved so strange, so still, so strong,  
It gave no sound, not even the song  
Of a sea-bird screaming defiance or fear.

It was dark and dreadful! Wide like an ocean,  
Much like a river but more like a sea,  
Save that there was naught of the turbulent  
motion  
Of tides, or of winds blown abaft, or alee.

Yea, strangely strong was the wave and slow,  
And half-way hid in the dark, deep tide,  
Great turtles, they paddled them to and fro,  
And away to the Isles and the opposite side.

The nude black boar through abundant grass  
Stole down to the water and buried his nose,  
And crunch'd white teeth till the bubbles rose  
As white and as bright as are globes of glass.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

Yea, steadily moved it, mile upon mile,  
Above and below and as still as the air ;  
The bank made slippery here and there  
By the slushing slide of the crocodile.

The great trees bent to the tide like slaves ;  
They dipp'd their boughs as the stream swept  
on,  
And then drew back, then dipp'd and were  
gone  
Away to the sea with the resolute waves.

The land was the tide's ; the shore was undone ;  
It look'd as the lawless, unsatisfied seas  
Had thrust up an arm through the tangle of  
trees,  
And clutched at the citrons that grew in the sun ;  
And clutch'd at the diamonds that hid in the  
sand,  
And laid heavy hand on the gold, and a hand  
On the redolent fruits, on the ruby-like wine,  
On the stones like the stars when the stars are  
divine ;

Had thrust through the rocks of the ribb'd  
Andes ;  
Had wrested and fled ; and had left a waste  
And a wide way strewn in precipitate haste,  
As he bore them away to the buccaneer seas.

Oh heavens, the eloquent song of the silence !  
Asleep lay the sun in the vines, on the sod.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

And asleep in the sun lay the green-girdled  
islands,

As rock'd to their rest in the cradle of God.  
God's poet is silence! His song is unspoken,  
And yet so profound, so loud, and so far,  
It fills you, it thrills you with measures unbroken,  
And as still, and as fair, and as far as a star.

The shallow seas moan. From the first they have  
mutter'd,

As a child that is fretted, and weeps at its  
will. . .

The poems of God are too grand to be utter'd:  
The dreadful deep seas they are loudest when  
still.

"I shall fold my hands, for this is the river  
Of death," he said, "and the sea-green isle  
Is an Eden set by the Gracious Giver  
Wherein to rest." He listened the while  
Then lifted his head, then lifted a hand  
Arch'd over his brow, and he lean'd and  
listen'd,—

'Twas only a bird on a border of sand,—  
The dark stream eddied and gleam'd and  
glisten'd,  
And the martial notes from the isle were  
gone,  
Gone as a dream dies out with the dawn.

'Twas only a bird on a border of sand,  
Slow piping, and diving it here and there,  
Slim, gray, and shadowy, light as the air,  
That dipp'd below from a point of the land.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

"Unto God a prayer and to love a tear,  
And I die," he said, "in a desert here,  
So deep that never a note is heard  
But the listless song of that soulless bird.

"The strong trees lean in their love unto trees,  
Lock arms in their loves, and are so made  
strong,  
Stronger than armies; aye, stronger than seas  
That rush from their caves in a storm of song.

"A miser of old, his last great treasure  
Flung far in the sea, and he fell and he died;  
And so shall I give, O terrible tide,  
To you my song and my last sad measure."

He blew on a reed by the still, strong river,  
Blew low at first, like a dream, then long,  
Then loud, then loud as the keys that quiver,  
And fret and toss with their freight of song.

He sang and he sang with a resolute will,  
Till the mono rested above on his haunches,  
And held his head to the side and was still,—  
Till a bird blown out of the night of branches  
Sang sadder than love, so sweeter than sad,  
Till the boughs did burthen and the reeds did  
fill  
With beautiful birds, and the boy was glad.

Our loves they are told by the myriad-eyed stars,  
And love it is grand in a reasonable way,  
And fame it is good in its way for a day,  
Borne dusty from books and bloody from wars;

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

And death, I say, is an absolute need,  
And a calm delight, and an ultimate good;  
But a song that is blown from a watery reed  
By a soundless deep from a boundless wood,  
With never a hearer to heed or to prize  
But God and the birds and the hairy wild  
beasts,  
Is sweeter than love, than fame, or than feasts,  
Or any thing else that is under the skies.

The quick leaves quiver'd, and the sunlight  
danced;  
As he boy sang sweet, and the birds said,  
"Sweet;"  
And the tiger crept close, and lay low at his  
feet,  
And he sheathed his claws as he listened en-  
tranced.

The serpent that hung from the sycamore bough,  
And sway'd his head in a crescent above,  
Had folded his neck to the white limb now,  
And fondled it close like a great black love.

But the hands grew weary, the heart wax'd faint,  
The loud notes fell to a far-off plaint,  
The sweet birds echo'd no more, "Oh, sweet,"  
The tiger arose and unsheathed his claws,  
The serpent extended his iron jaws,  
And the frail reed shiver'd and fell at his feet.

A sound on the tide! and he turn'd and cried,  
"Oh, give God thanks, for they come, they  
come!"

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

---

He look'd out afar on the opaline tide,  
Then clasp'd his hands, and his lips were  
dumb.

A sweeping swift crescent of sudden canoes!  
As light as the sun of the south and as soon,  
And true and as still as a sweet half-moon  
That leans from the heavens, and loves and  
woos!

The Amazons came in their martial pride,  
As full on the stream as a studding of stars,  
All girded in armor as girded in wars,  
In foamy white furrows dividing the tide.

With a face as brown as the boatmen's are,  
Or the brave, brown hand of a harvester;  
The Queen on a prow stood splendid and tall,  
As the petulent waters did lift and fall;

Stood forth for the song, half lean'd in surprise,  
Stood fair to behold, and yet grand to behold,  
And austere in her face, and saturnine-soul'd,  
And sad and subdued, in her eloquent eyes.

And sad were they all; yet tall and serene  
Of presence, but silent, and brow'd severe;  
As for some things lost, or for some fair, green,  
And beautiful place, to the memory dear.

"O Mother of God! Thrice merciful saint!  
I am saved!" he said, and he wept outright;  
Ay, wept as even a woman might,  
For the soul was full and the heart was faint.



## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

---

"Stay! stay!" cried the Queen, and she leapt to  
the land,  
And she lifted her hand, and she lowered their  
spears,  
"A woman! a woman! ho! 'help! give a hand!  
A woman! a woman! I know by the tears."

Then gently as touch of the truest of woman,  
They lifted him up from the earth where he  
fell,  
And into the boat, with a half hidden swell  
Of the heart that was holy and tenderly human.

They spoke low-voiced as a vesper prayer;  
They pillow'd his head as only the hand  
Of woman can pillow, and push'd from the  
land,  
And the Queen she sat threading the gold of his  
hair.



## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

### PART II.

*Forsake those People. What are they  
That laugh, that live, that love by rule?  
Forsake the Saxon. Who are these  
That shun the shadows of the trees;  
The perfumed forests? . . . Go thy way,  
We are not one. I will not please  
You:—fare you well, O wiser fool!*

*But ye who love me:—Ye who love  
The shaggy forests, fierce delights  
Of sounding waterfalls, of heights  
That hang like broken moons above,  
With brows of pine that brush the sun,  
Believe and follow. We are one:  
The wild man shall to us be tame,  
The woods shall yield their mysteries;  
The stars shall answer to a name,  
And be as birds above the trees.*

They swept to their Isles through the furrows of  
foam;  
They alit on the land, as love hastening home,  
And below the banana, with leaf like a tent,  
They tenderly laid him, they bade him take  
rest,  
They brought him strange fishes and fruits of  
the best,  
And he ate and took rest with a patient content.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

They watched so well that he rose up strong,  
And stood in their midst, and they said, "How  
fair!"

And they said, "How tall!" And they toy'd  
with his hair.

And they touched his limbs and they said, "How  
long

And how strong they are; and how brave she is,  
That she made her way through the wiles of  
man,

That she braved his wrath that she broke the  
ban

Of his desolate life for the love of this!"

They wrought for him armor and cunning attire,  
They brought him a sword and a great shell  
shield,

And implored him to shiver the lance on the  
field,

And to follow their beautiful Queen in her ire.

But he took him apart; then the Amazons came

And entreated of him with their eloquent eyes

And their earnest and passionate souls of flame,

And the soft, sweet words that are broken of  
sighs,

To be one of their own, but he still denied

And bow'd and abash'd he stole further aside.

He stood by the Palms and he lean'd in unrest,

And standing alone, looked out and afar,

For his own fair land where the castles are,

With irresolute arms on a restless breast.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

---

He re-lived his loves, he recall'd his wars,  
He gazed and he gazed with a soul distress'd,  
Like a far sweet star that is lost in the west,  
Till the day was broken to a dust of stars.

They sigh'd, and they left him alone in the care  
Of faithfullest matron; they moved to the field  
With the lifted sword and the sounding shield  
High fretting magnificent storms of hair.

And, true as the moon in her march of stars,  
The Queen stood forth in her fierce attire  
Worn as they trained or worn in the wars,  
As bright and as chaste as a flash of fire.

With girdles of gold and of silver cross'd,  
And plaited, and chased, and bound together,  
Broader and stronger than belts of leather,  
Cunningly fashion'd and blazon'd and boss'd—

With diamonds circling her, stone upon stone,  
Above the breast where the borders fail,  
Below the breast where the fringes zone,  
She moved in a glittering garment of mail.

The form made hardy and the waist made spare  
From athlete sports and adventures bold,  
The breastplate; fasten'd with clasps of gold,  
Was clasp'd, as close as the breasts could bear,—

And bound and drawn to a delicate span,  
It flash'd in the red front ranks of the field—  
Was fashion'd full trim in its intricate plan  
And gleam'd as a sign, as well as a shield,

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

---

That the virgin Queen was unyielding still,  
And pure as the tides that around her ran;  
True to her trust, and strong in her will  
Of war, and hatred to the touch of man.

The field it was theirs in storm or in shine,  
So fairly they stood that the foe came not  
To battle again, and the fair forgot  
The rage of battle; and they trimm'd the vine,

They tended the fields of the tall green corn,  
They crush'd the grape and they drew the  
wine  
In the great round gourds and the bended horn—  
And they lived as the gods in the days divine.

They bathed in the wave in the amber morn,  
They took repose in the peaceful shade  
Of eternal palms, and were never afraid;  
Yet oft did they sigh, and look far and forlorn.

Where the rim of the wave was weaving a spell,  
And the grass grew soft where it hid from the  
sun,  
Would the Amazons gather them every one  
At the call of the Queen or the sound of her  
shell:

Would come in strides through the kingly trees,  
And train and marshal them brave and well  
In the golden noon, in the hush of peace  
Where the shifting shades of the fan-palms  
fell;

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

Would train till flush'd and as warm as wine:  
Would reach with their limbs, would thrust  
with the lance,  
Attack, retire, retreat and advance,  
Then wheel in column, then fall in line;  
Stand thigh and thigh with the limbs made hard  
And rich and round as the swift limb'd pard,  
Or a racer train'd, or a white bull caught  
In the lasso's toils, where the tame are not:

Would curve as the waves curve, swerve in line;  
Would dash through the trees, would train  
with the bow,  
Then back to the lines, now sudden, then slow,  
Then flash their swords in the sun at a sign:

Would settle the foot right firmly afront,  
Then sound the shield till the sound was heard  
Afar, as the horn in the black boar hunt;  
Yet, strangest of all, say never one word.

When shadows fell far from the westward, and  
when  
The sun had kiss'd hands and set forth for  
the east,  
They would kindle campfires and gather them  
then,  
Well-worn and most merry with song, to the  
feast.

They sang of all things, but the one, sacred one,  
That could make them most glad, as they lifted  
the gourd  
And pass'd it around, with its rich purple  
hoard,

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

---

From the island that lay with its face to the sun.

Though lips were most luscious, and eyes as  
divine

As the eyes of the skies that bend down from  
above;

Though hearts were made glad and most mel-  
low with love,

As dripping gourds drain'd of their burthens of  
wine;

Though brimming, and dripping, and bent of  
their shape

Were the generous gourds from the juice of the  
grape,

They could sing not of love, they could breathe  
not a thought

Of the savor of life; of love sought, or unsought.

Their loves they were not; they had banished the  
name

Of man, and the uttermost mention of love,—

The moonbeams about them, the quick stars  
above,

The mellow-voiced waves, they were ever the  
same,

In sign, and in saying, of the old true lies;

But they took no heed; no answering sign,

Save glances averted and half-hush'd sighs,

Went back from the breasts with their loves  
divine.

Then sang of free life with a will, and well,

They had paid for it well when the price was  
blood;

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

They beat on the shield, and they blew on the  
shell,

When their wars were not, for they held it  
good

To be glad, and to sing till the flush of the day,  
In an annual feast, when the broad leaves fell;  
Yet some sang not, and some sighed, "Ah,  
well!"—

For there's far less left you to sing or to say,  
When mettlesome love is banish'd, I ween—

To hint at as hidden, or to half disclose  
In the swift sword-cuts of the tongue, made keen  
With wine at a feast,—than one would sup-  
pose.

So the days wore by, but they brought no rest  
To the minstrel knight, though the sun was as  
gold,

And the Isles were green, and the great Queen  
blest

In the splendor of arms, and as pure as bold.

He would now resolve to reveal to her all,  
His sex and his race in a well-timed song;  
And his love of peace, his hatred of wrong,  
And his own deceit, though the sun should fall.

Then again he would linger, and knew not how  
He could best proceed, and deferr'd him now  
Till a favorite day, when the fair day came,  
And still he delay'd, and reproached him the  
same.

And he still said nought, but, subduing his head  
He wander'd one day in a dubious spell

[ III ]



## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

Of unutterable thought of the truth unsaid,  
To the indolent shore, and he gather'd a shell,  
And he shaped its point to his passionate mouth,  
And he turn'd to a bank and began to blow,  
While the Amazons trained in a troop below—  
Blew soft and sweet as a kiss of the south.

The Amazons lifted with glad surprise,  
Stood splendid and glad and look'd far and  
fair,  
Set forward a foot, and shook back their hair,  
Like clouds push'd back from the sun-lit skies.

It stirr'd their souls, and they ceased to train  
In troop by the shore, as the tremulous strain  
Fell down from the hill through the tasselling  
trees;

And a murmur of song, like the sound of bees  
In the clover crown of a queenly spring,  
Came back unto him, and he laid the shell  
Aside on the bank, and began to sing  
Of eloquent love; and the ancient spell  
Of passionate song was his, and the Isle,  
As waked to delight from its slumber long,  
Came back in echoes; yet all this while  
He knew not at all the sin of his song.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

### PART III

*Come, lovers, come, forget your pains!  
I know upon this earth a spot  
Where clinking coins, that clank as chains,  
Upon the souls of men, are not;  
Nor man is measured for his gains  
Of gold that stream with crimson stains.*

*There snow-topp'd towers crush the clouds  
And break the still abode of stars,  
Like sudden ghosts in snowy shrouds,  
New broken through their earthly bars,  
And condors whet their crooked beaks  
On lofty limits of the peaks.*

*O men that fret as frets the main!  
You irk me with your eager gaze  
Down in the earth for fat increase—  
Eternal talks of gold and gain,  
Your shallow wit, your shallow ways,  
And breaks my soul across the shoal  
As breakers break on shallow seas.*

They bared their brows to the palms above,  
But some look'd level into comrades' eyes,  
And they then remember'd that the thought of  
love  
Was the thing forbidden, and they sank in sighs.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

They turned from the training, to heed in throng  
To the old, old tale; and they trained no more,  
As he sang of love; and some on the shore,  
And full in the sound of the eloquent song,

With womanly air and an irresolute will  
Went listlessly onward as gathering shells;  
Then gazed in the waters, as bound by spells;  
Then turned to the song and so sigh'd, and were  
still.

And they said no word. Some tapp'd on the  
sand  
With the sandal'd foot, keeping time to the  
sound,  
In a sort of dream; some timed with the hand,  
And one held eyes full of tears to the ground.

She thought of the days when their wars they  
were not,  
As she lean'd and listened to the old, old song,  
When they sang of their loves, and she well for-  
got  
Man's hard oppressions and a world of wrong.

Like a pure true woman, with her trust in tears  
And the things that are true, she relieved them  
in thought,  
Though hush'd and crush'd in the fall of the  
years;  
She lived but the fair, and the false she forgot.

As a tale long told, or as things that are dreams  
The quivering curve of the lip it confest

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

The silent regrets, and the soul that teems  
With a world of love in a brave true breast.

Then this one, younger, who had known no love,  
Nor look'd upon man but in blood on the field,  
She bow'd her head, and she leaned on her  
shield,

And her heart beat quick as the wings of a dove  
That is blown from the sea, where the rests are  
not

In the time of storms; and by instinct taught  
Grew pensive, and sigh'd; as she thought and  
she thought

Of some wonderful things, and—she knew not  
of what.

Then this one thought of a love forsaken,  
She thought of a brown sweet babe, and she  
thought

Of the bread-fruits gather'd, of the swift fish  
taken

In intricate nets, like a love well sought.

She thought of the moons of her maiden dawn,  
Mellow'd and fair with the forms of man;

So dearer indeed to dwell upon

Than the beautiful waves that around her ran:

So fairer indeed than the fringes of light

That lie at rest on the west of the sea

In furrows of foam on the borders of night,

And dearer indeed than the songs to be—

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

Than calling of dreams from the opposite land,  
To the land of life, and of journeys dreary,  
When the soul goes over from the form grown  
weary,  
And walks in the cool of the trees on the sand.

But the Queen was enraged and would smite  
him at first  
With the sword unto death, yet it seemed that  
she durst  
Not touch him at all; and she moved as to chide,  
And she lifted her face, and she frown'd at his  
side,  
Then she touch'd on his arm; then she looked  
in his eyes  
And right full in his soul, but she saw no fear,  
In the pale fair face, and with frown severe  
She press'd her lips as suppressing her sighs.

She banish'd her wrath, she unbended her face,  
She lifted her hand and put back his hair  
From his fair sad brow, with a penitent air,  
And forgave him all with unuttered grace.

But she said no word, yet no more was severe;  
She stood as subdued by the side of him still,  
Then averted her face with a resolute will,  
As to hush a regret, or to hide back a tear.

She sighed to herself: "A stranger is this,  
And ill and alone, that knows not at all  
That a throne shall totter and the strong shall  
fall,  
At the mention of love and its banefullest bliss.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

---

"O life that is lost in bewildering love—  
But a stranger is sacred!" She lifted a hand  
And she laid it as soft as the breast of a dove  
On the minstrel's mouth. It was more than  
the wand  
Of the tamer of serpents, for she did no more  
Than to bid with here eyes and to beck with  
her hand,  
And the song drew away to the waves of the  
shore;  
Took wings, as it were, to the verge of the land.

But her heart was oppress'd. With penitent head  
She turned to her troop, and retiring, she said:  
"Alas! and alas! shall it come to pass  
That the panther shall die from a blade of grass?

That the tiger shall yield at the bent-horn's  
blast?

That we, who have conquer'd a world and all  
Of men and of beasts in the world must fall  
Ourselves at the mention of love at last?"

The tall Queen turn'd with her troop;  
She led minstrel and all to the innermost part  
Of the palm-crowned Isle, where great trees  
group  
In armies, to battle when black-storms start,  
And made a retreat from the sun by the trees  
That are topp'd like tents, where the fire-flies  
Are a light to the feet, and a fair lake lies,  
As cool as the coral-set center of seas.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

The palm-trees lorded the copse like kings,  
Their tall tops tossing the indolent clouds  
That folded the Isle in the dawn, like shrouds,  
Then fled from the sun like to living things.

The cockatoo swung in the vines below,  
And muttering hung on a golden thread,  
Or moved on the moss'd bough to and fro,  
In plumes of gold and array'd in red.

The lake lay hidden away from the light,  
As asleep in the Isle from the tropical noon,  
And narrow and bent like a new-born moon,  
And fair as a moon in the noon of the night.

'Twas shadow'd by forests, and fringed by ferns,  
And fretted anon by red fishes that leapt  
At indolent flies that slept or kept  
Their drowsy tones on the tide by turns.

And here in the dawn when the Day was strong  
And newly aroused from leafy repose,  
With dew on his feet and tints of the rose  
In his great flush'd face was a sense of song  
That the tame old world has not known or heard.

The soul was filled with the soft perfumes,  
The eloquent wings of the humming bird  
Beguiled the heart, they purpled the air  
And allured the eye, as so everywhere  
On the rim of the wave or across it in swings,  
They swept or they sank in a sea of blooms,  
And wove and wound in a song of wings.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

---

A bird in scarlet and gold, made mad  
With sweet delights, through the branches slid  
And kiss'd the lake on a drowsy lid  
Till the ripples ran and the face was glad;

Was glad and lovely as lights that sweep  
The face of heaven when the stars are forth  
In autumn time through the sapphire north,  
Or the face of a child when it smiles in sleep.

And here came the Queen, in the tropical noon,  
When the wars and the world and all were  
asleep,  
And nothing look'd forth to betray or to peep  
Through the glories of jungle in garments of  
June,  
To bathe with her court in the waters that  
bent  
In the beautiful lake through tasseling trees,  
And the tangle of blooms in a burden of bees,  
As bold and as sharp as a bow unspent.

And strangely still, and more strangely sweet,  
Was the lake that lay in its cradle of fern,  
As still as a moon with her horns that turn  
In the night, like lamps to white delicate feet.

They came and they stood by the brink of the  
tide,  
They hung their shields on the boughs of the  
trees,



## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

They lean'd their lances against the side,  
Unloosed their sandals, and busy as bees  
Ungather'd their robes in the rustle of leaves  
That wound them as close as the wine-vine  
weaves.

The minstrel then falter'd, and further aside  
Then ever before he averted his head;  
He pick'd up a pebble and fretted the tide  
Afar, with a countenance flushed and red.

He feign'd him ill, he wander'd away,  
He sat him down by the waters alone,  
And pray'd for pardon, as a knight should pray,  
And rued an error not all his own.

The Amazons press'd to the girdle of reeds,  
Two and by two they advanced to the tide,  
They challenged each other, they laughed in  
their pride,  
And banter'd, and vaunted of valorous deeds.

They push'd and they parted the curtains of  
green,  
All timid at first; then looked in the wave  
And laugh'd; retreated, then came up brave  
To the brink of the water, led on by their Queen.

Again they retreated, again advanced,  
Then parted the boughs in a proud disdain,  
Then bent their heads to the waters, and glanced  
Below, then blush'd, and then laughed again.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

A bird awaken'd; then all dismayed  
With a womanly sense of a beautiful shame  
That strife and changes had left the same,  
They shrank to the leaves and the somber shade.

At last, press'd forward a beautiful pair  
And leapt to the wave, and laughing they  
blushed  
As rich as their wines; when the waters rush'd  
To the dimpled limbs, and laugh'd in their hair.

The fair troop follow'd with shouts and cheers,  
They cleft the wave, and the friendly ferns  
Came down in curtains and curves by turns,  
And a brave palm lifted a thousand spears.

From under the ferns and away from the land,  
And out in the wave until lost below,  
There lay, as white as a bank of snow,  
A long and beautiful border of sand.

Here clothed alone in their clouds of hair  
And curtain'd about by the palm and fern,  
And made as their maker had made them, fair,  
And splendid of natural curve and turn;  
Untrammel'd by art and untroubled by man  
They tested their strength, or tried their speed:  
And here they wrestled, and there they ran,  
As supple and lithe as the watery reed.

The great trees shadow'd the bow-tipp'd tide,  
And nodded their plumes from the opposite side,  
As if to whisper, Take care! take care!  
But the meddlesome sunshine here and there

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

Kept pointing a finger right under the trees,—  
Kept shifting the branches and wagging a  
hand

At the round brown limbs on the border of  
sand,  
And seem'd to whisper: Fie! what are these?

The gold-barr'd butterflies to and fro  
And over the waterside wander'd and wove  
As heedless and idle as clouds that rove  
And drift by the peaks of perpetual snow.

A monkey swung out from a bough in the skies,  
White-whisker'd and ancient, and wisest of all  
Of his populous race, when he heard them call  
And he watch'd them long, with his head side-  
wise.

He wondered much and he watch'd them all  
From under his brows of amber and brown,  
All patient and silent, and never once stirr'd  
Till he saw two wrestle, and wrestling fall;  
Then he arched his brows and he hasten'd him  
down  
To his army below and said never a word.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

### PART IV

*There is many a love in the land, my love,  
But never a love like this is;  
Then kill me dead with your love, my love,  
And cover me up with kisses.*

*Yea, kill me dead and cover me deep  
Where never a soul discovers;  
Deep in your heart to sleep, to sleep,  
In the darlingest tomb of lovers.*

The wanderer took him apart from the place;  
Look'd up in the boughs at the gold birds  
there,  
He envied the humming-birds fretting the air,  
And frowned at the butterflies fanning his face.

He sat him down in a crook of the wave  
And away from the Amazons, under the skies  
Where great trees curved to a leaf-lined cave,  
And he lifted his hands and he shaded his  
eyes:

And he held his head to the north when they  
came  
To run on the reaches of sand from the south,  
And he pull'd at his chin, and he pursed his  
mouth,  
And he shut his eyes, with a sense of shame.

He reach'd and he shaped a bamboo reed  
From the brink below, and began to blow

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

As if to himself; as the sea sometimes  
Does soothe and soothe in a low, sweet song,  
When his rage is spent, and the beach swells  
strong  
With sweet repetitions of alliterate rhymes.

The echoes blew back from the indolent land;  
Silent and still sat the tropical bird,  
And only the sound of the reed was heard,  
As the Amazons ceased from their sports on the  
sand.

They rose from the wave, and inclining the head,  
They listened intent, with the delicate tip  
Of the finger touch'd to the pouting lip,  
Till the brown Queen turn'd in the tide, and led  
Through the opaline lake, and under the shade,  
To the shore where the chivalrous singer  
played.

He bended his head and he shaded his eyes  
As well as he might with his lifted fingers,  
And ceased to sing. But in mute surprise  
He saw them linger as a child that lingers  
Allured by a song that has ceased in the street,  
And looks bewildered about from its play,  
For the last loved notes that fell at its feet.

How the singer was vexed; he averted his head;  
He lifted his eyes, looked far and wide  
For a brief, little time; but they bathed at his  
side  
In spite of his will, or of prayers well said.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

He press'd four fingers against each lid,  
Till the light was gone; yet for all that he did  
It seem'd that the lithe forms lay and beat  
Afloat in his face and full under his feet.

He seem'd to behold the billowy breasts,  
And the rounded limbs in the rest or unrests—  
To see them swim as the mermaid swims,  
With the drifting, dimpled delicate limbs,  
Folded or hidden or reach'd or caress'd.

It seems to me there is more that sees  
Than the eyes in man; you may close your  
eyes,

You may turn your back, and may still be wise  
In sacred and marvelous mysteries.

He saw as one sees the sun of a noon

In the sun-kiss'd south, when the eyes are  
closed—

He saw as one sees the bars of a moon  
That fall through the boughs of the tropical  
trees,

When he lies at length, and is all composed,  
And asleep in his hammock by the sundown seas.

He heard the waters beat, bubble and fret;

He lifted his eyes, yet forever they lay

Afloat in the tide; and he turn'd him away  
And resolved to fly and for aye to forget.

He rose up strong, and he cross'd him twice,

He nerved his heart and he lifted his head,

He crush'd the treacherous reed in a trice,

With an angry foot, and he turn'd and fled.

Yet flying, he hurriedly turn'd his head

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

---

With an eager glance, with meddlesome eyes,  
As a woman will turn; and he saw arise

The beautiful Queen from the silvery bed.  
She toss'd back her hair, and she turn'd her eyes  
With all of their splendor to his as he fled;  
Ay, all their glory, and a strange surprise,  
And a sad reproach, and a world unsaid.

Then she struck their shields, they rose in array,  
As roused from a trance, and hurriedly came  
From out of the wave. He wander'd away,  
Still fretting his sensitive soul with blame.

Alone he sat in the shadows at noon,  
Alone he sat by the waters at night;  
Alone he sang, as a woman might,  
With pale, kind face to the pale, cold moon.

He would here advance, and would there retreat,  
As a petulant child that has lost its way  
In the redolent walks of a sultry day,  
And wanders around with irresolute feet.

He made him a harp of mahogany wood,  
He strung it well with the sounding strings  
Of a strong bird's thews, and from ostrich  
wings,  
And play'd and sang in a sad, sweet rune.  
He hang'd his harp in the vines, and stood  
By the tide at night, in the palms at noon,  
And lone as a ghost in the shadowy wood.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

Then two grew sad, and alone sat she  
By the great, strong stream, and she bow'd her  
head,  
Then lifted her face to the tide, and said :

"O, pure as a tear and as strong as a sea,  
Yet tender to me as the touch of a dove,  
I had rather sit sad and alone by thee,  
Than to go and be glad, with a legion in love."

She sat one time at the wanderer's side  
As the kingly water went wandering by;  
And the two once look'd, and they knew not  
why,  
Full sad in each other's eyes, and they sigh'd.

She courted the solitude under the rim  
Of the trees that reach'd to the resolute stream,  
And gazed in the waters as one in a dream,  
Till her soul grew heavy and her eyes grew dim.

She bow'd her head with a beautiful grief  
That grew from her pity; she forgot her arms,  
And she made neglect of the battle alarms  
That threaten'd the land; the banana's leaf  
Made shelter; he lifted his harp again,  
She sat, she listen'd intent and long,  
Forgetting her care and forgetting her pain—  
Made sad for the singer, made glad for his  
song.



## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

---

And the women waxed cold; the white moons  
waned,  
And the brown Queen marshall'd them never  
once more,  
With sword and with shield, in the palms by  
the shore;  
But they sat them down to repose, or remain'd  
Apart and scatter'd in the tropic-leaf'd trees,  
As sadden'd by song, or for loves delay'd;  
Or away in the Isle in couples they stray'd,  
Not at all content in their Isles of peace.

They wander'd away to the lakes once more,  
Or walk'd in the moon, or they sigh'd or slept,  
Or they sat in pairs by the shadowy shore,  
And silent song with the waters kept.

There was one who stood by the waters one eve,  
With the stars on her hair, and the bars of the  
moon  
Broken up at her feet by the bountiful boon  
Of extending old trees, who did questioning  
grieve;

"The birds they go over us two and by two;  
The mono is mated; his bride in the boughs  
Sits nursing his babe, and his passionate vows  
Of love, you may hear them the whole day  
through.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

"The lizard, the cayman, the white-tooth'd boar,  
The serpents that glide in the sword-leaf'd  
grass,  
The beasts that abide or the birds that pass,  
They are glad in their loves as the green-leaf'd  
shore.

"There is nothing that is that can yield one bliss  
Like an innocent love; the leaves have tongue  
And the tides talk low in the reeds, and the  
young  
And the quick buds open their lips but for this.

"In the steep and the starry silences,  
On the stormy levels of the limitless seas, \*  
Or here in the deeps of the dark-brow'd trees,  
There is nothing so much as a brave man's kiss.

"There is nothing so strong, in the stream, on  
the land,  
In the valley of palms, on the pinnacled snow,  
In the clouds of the gods, on the grasses below,  
As the silk-soft touch of a baby's brown hand.

"It were better to sit and to spin on a stone  
The whole year through with a babe at the  
knee,  
With its brown hands reaching caressingly,  
Than to sit in a girdle of gold and alone.

"It were better indeed to be mothers of men,  
And to murmur not much; there are clouds  
in the sun.  
Can a woman undo what the gods have done?  
Nay, the things must be as the things have been."

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

They wander'd well forth, some here and some  
there,

Unsatisfied some and irresolute all.

The sun was the same, the moonlight did fall  
Rich-barr'd and refulgent; the stars were as fair  
As ever were stars; the fruitful clouds cross'd

And the harvest fail'd not; yet the fair Isles  
grew

As a prison to all, and they search'd on  
through

The magnificent shades as for things that were  
lost.

The minstrel, more pensive, went deep in the  
wood,

And oft-time delay'd him the whole day  
through,

As charm'd by the deeps, or the sad heart drew  
Some solaces sweet from the solitude.

The singer forsook them at last, and the Queen  
Came seldom then forth from the fierce deep  
wood,

And her warriors, dark-brow'd and bewildering  
stood

In bands by the wave in the complicate screen  
Of overbent boughs. They would lean on their  
spears

And would sometimes talk, low-voiced and by  
twos,

As allured by longings they could not refuse,  
And would sidewise look, as beset by their fears.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

Once, wearied and sad, by the shadowy trees  
In the flush of the sun they sank to their rests,  
The dark hair veiling the beautiful breasts  
That arose in billows, as mists veil seas.

Then away to the dream-world one by one;  
The great red sun in his purple was roll'd,  
And red-wing'd birds and the birds of gold  
Were above in the trees like the beams of the  
sun.

Then the sun came down, on his ladders of gold  
Built up of his beams, and the souls arose  
And ascended on these, and the fair repose  
Of the negligent forms was a feast to behold.

The round brown limbs they were reach'd or  
drawn,  
The grass made dark with the fervour of hair;  
And here were the rose-red lips and there  
A flush'd breast rose like a sun at a dawn.

Then black-wing'd birds flew over in pair,  
Listless and slow, as they call'd of the seas  
And sounds came down through the tangle of  
trees  
As lost, and nestled, and hid in their hair.

They started disturb'd, they sprang as at war  
To lance and to shield; but the dolorous sound  
Was gone from the wood; they gazed around  
And saw but the birds, black-wing'd and afar.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

---

They gazed at each other, then turn'd them un-  
heard,  
Slow trailing their lances, in long single line;  
They moved through the forest, all dark as  
the sign  
Of death that fell down from the ominous bird.

Then the great sun died, and a rose-red bloom  
Grew over his grave in a border of gold,  
And a cloud with a silver-white rim was roll'd  
Like a cold gray stone at the door of his tomb.

Strange voices were heard, sad visions were seen,  
By sentries, betimes, on the opposite shore,  
Where broad boughs bended their curtains of  
green  
Far over the wave with their tropical store.

A sentry bent low on her palms and she peer'd  
Suspiciously through; and, heavens! a man,  
Low-brow'd and wicked, looked backward, and  
jeer'd  
And taunted right full in her face as he ran:

A low crooked man, with eyes like a bird,—  
As round and as cunning,—who came from the  
land  
Of lakes, where the clouds lie low and at  
hand,  
And the songs of the bent black swans are heard;

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

---

Where men are most cunning and cruel withal,  
And are famous as spies, and are supple and  
fleet,  
And are webb'd like the water-fowl under the  
feet,  
And they swim like the swans, and like pelican's  
call.

And again, on a night when the moon she was  
not,  
A sentry saw stealing, as still as a dream,  
A sudden canoe down the mid of the stream,  
Like the dark boat of death, and as still as a  
thought.

And lo! as it pass'd, from the prow there arose  
A dreadful and gibbering, hairy old man,  
Loud laughing as only a maniac can,  
And shaking a lance at the land of his foes;  
Then sudden it vanish'd, as still as it came,  
Far down through the walls of the shadowy  
wood,  
And the great moon rose like a forest aflame,  
All threat'ning, sullen, and red like blood.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

### PART V

*Well, we have threaded through and through  
The gloaming forests, Fairy Isles,  
Afloat in sun and summer smiles,  
As fallen stars in fields of blue;  
Some futile wars with subtle love  
That mortal never vanquish'd yet,  
Some symphonies by angels set  
In wave below, in bough above,  
Were yours and mine; but here adieu.*

*And if it come to pass some days  
That you grow weary, sad, and you  
Lift up deep eyes from dusty ways  
Of mart and moneys to the blue  
And pure cold waters, isle and vine,  
And bathe you there, and then arise  
'Refresh'd by one fresh thought of mine,  
I rest content: I kiss your eyes,  
I kiss your hair, in my delight:  
I kiss my hand, and say, "Good-night."*

I tell you that love is the bitterest sweet  
That ever laid hold on the heart of a man;  
A chain to the soul, and to cheer as a ban,  
And a bane to the brain and a snare to the feet.

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

Aye! who shall ascend on the hollow white wings  
Of love but to fall; to fall and to learn,  
Like a moth, or a man, that the lights lure to  
burn,  
That the roses have thorns and the honey-bee  
stings?

I say to you surely that grief shall befall;  
I lift you my finger, I caution you true,  
And yet you go forward, laugh gaily, and you  
Must learn for yourself, then lament for us all.

You had better be drown'd than to love and to  
dream.  
It were better to sit on a moss-grown stone,  
And away from the sun, forever alone,  
Slow pitching white pebbles at trout in a stream.

Alas for a heart that must live forlorn!  
If you live you must love; if you love, regret—  
It were better, perhaps, had you never been  
born,  
Or better, at least, you could well forget.

The clouds are above us and snowy and cold,  
And what is beyond but the steel gray sky,  
And the still far stars that twinkle and lie  
Like the eyes of a love or delusions of gold!

Ah! who would ascend? The clouds are above.  
Aye! all things perish; to rise is to fall.  
And alack for lovers, and alas for love,  
And alas that we ever were born at all.

\* \* \* \* \*



## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

The minstrel now stood by the border of wood,  
But now not alone; with a resolute heart  
He reach'd his hand, like to one made strong,  
Forgot his silence and resumed his song,  
And aroused his soul, and assumed his part  
With a passionate will, in the palms where he  
stood.

"She is sweet as the breath of the Castile rose,  
She is warm to the heart as a world of wine,  
And as rich to behold as the rose that grows  
With its red heart bent to the tide of the Rhine.

"I shall sip her lips as the brown bees sup  
From the great gold heart of the buttercup!  
I shall live and love! I shall have my day,  
And die in my time, and who shall gainsay?

"What boots me the battles that I have fought  
With self for honor? My brave resolves?  
And who takes note? The soul dissolves  
In a sea of love, and the wars are forgot.

"The march of men, and the drift of ships,  
The dreams of fame, and desires for gold,  
Shall go for aye as a tale that is told,  
Nor divide for a day my lips from her lips.

"And a knight shall rest, and none shall say nay,  
In a green Isle wash'd by an arm of the seas,  
And walled from the world by the white  
Andes:  
The years are of age and can go their way."

\* \* \* \* \*

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

A sentinel stood on the farthestmost land,  
And struck her shield, and her sword in hand,

She cried, "He comes with his silver spears,  
With flint-tipp'd arrows and bended bows,  
To take our blood though we give him tears,  
And to flood our Isle in a world of woes!

"He comes, O Queen of the sun-kiss'd Isle,  
He comes as a wind comes, blown from the  
seas,

In a cloud of canoes, on the curling breeze,  
With his shields of tortoise and of crocodile!"  
\* \* \* \* \*

Sweeter than swans' are a maiden's graces!  
Sweeter than fruits are the kisses of morn!  
Sweeter than babes' is a love new-born,  
But sweeter than all are a love's embraces.

The Queen was at peace. Her terms of sur-  
render  
To love, who knows? and who can defend her?  
She slept at peace, and the sentry's warning  
Could scarce awaken the love-conquer'd  
Queen;  
She slept at peace in the opaline  
Hush and blush of that tropical morning;

And bound about by the twining glory,  
Vine and trellis in the vernal morn,  
As still and sweet as a babe new-born,  
The brown Queen dream'd of the old new story.

But hark! her sentry's passionate words,  
The sound of shields, and the clash of swords!

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

And slow she came, her head on her breast,  
And her two hands held as to plead for rest.

Where, O where, were the Juno graces?

Where, O where, was the glance of Jove,  
As the Queen came forth from the sacred places,  
Hidden away in the heart of the grove?

They rallied around as of old,—they besought  
her,

With swords to the sun and the sounding  
shield,

To lead them again to the glorious field,  
So sacred to Freedom; and, breathless, they  
brought her

Her buckler and sword, and her armor all bright  
With a thousand gems enjewell'd in gold.

She lifted her head with the look of old  
An instant only; with all of her might

She sought to be strong and majestic again:

She bared them her arms and her ample brown  
breast;

They lifted her armor, they strove to invest  
Her form in armor, but they strove in vain.

It could close no more, but it clang'd on the  
ground,

Like the fall of a knight, with an ominous sound,

And she shook her hair and she cried "Alas!

That love should come and liberty pass;"

And she cried, "Alas! to be cursed . . . and  
bless'd

For the nights of love and noons of rest."

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

Her warriors wonder'd; they wander'd apart,  
And trail'd their swords, and subdued their  
eyes

To earth in sorrow and in hush'd surprise,  
And forgot themselves in their pity of heart.

"O Isles of the sun," sang the blue-eyed youth,  
"O Edens new-made and let down from above!  
Be sacred to peace and to passionate love,  
Made happy in peace and made holy with truth."

The fair Isle fill'd with the fierce invader;  
They form'd on the strand, they lifted their  
spears,

Where never was man for years and for years,  
And moved on the Queen. She lifted and laid  
her

Finger-tips to her lips. For O sweet  
Was the song of love as the love new-born,  
That the minstrel blew in the virgin morn,  
Away where the trees and the soft sands meet.

The strong men lean'd and their shields let fall,  
And slowly they came with their trailing  
spears,

And heads bow'd down as if bent with years,  
And an air of gentleness over them all.

The men grew glad as the song ascended,  
They lean'd their lances against the palms,  
They reach'd their arms as to reach for alms,  
And the Amazons came—and their reign was  
ended.

\* \* \* \* \*

## ISLES OF THE AMAZONS

---

The tawny old crone here lays her stone  
On the leaning grass and reaches a hand;  
The day like a beautiful dream has flown,  
The curtains of night come down on the land,  
And I dip to the oars; but ere I go,  
I tip her an extra bright pesos or so,  
And I smile my thanks, for I think them due:  
But, reader, fair reader, now what think you?

I do not like this, although I have cut it up and cut it down, and worked it over and over more than anything else. I had seen this vast and indescribable country, but not absorbed it; and that, most likely, is the reason it seems artificial and foolish, with knights and other things that I know nothing about. The only thing that I like in it is the water. I can handle water, and water is water the world over. But had it not been for the water and some of the wild tangles and jungles the whole thing would, ere this, have gone where the biggest half went long since. It was written in San Francisco, and was published at the same time in the *Overland* there and the *Gentleman's Magazine* in London. It was written at the instance of the Emperor, who translated it and to the last was brave and courtly enough to insist that it was good work. I had hoped to induce people to pour out of crowded London and better their fortunes there; for there is great wealth far, far up the Amazon. Aye, what exultant pride swelled my heart one happy day in Rome when Partridge, our minister to Brazil, gave me that message of thanks from the good Emperor, with a request to make his home my own while he lived.

## AN INDIAN SUMMER

*The world it is wide; men go their ways  
But love he is wise, and of all the hours,  
And of all the beautiful sun-born days,  
He sips their sweets as the bee sips flowers.*

The sunlight lay in gather'd sheaves  
Along the ground, the golden leaves  
Possess'd the land and lay in bars  
Above the lifted lawn of green  
Beneath the feet, or fell, as stars  
Fall, slantwise, shimmering and still  
Upon the plain, upon the hill,  
And heaving hill and plain between.

Some steeds in panoply were seen,  
Strong, martial trained, with manes in air,  
And tassell'd reins and mountings rare;  
Some silent people here and there,  
That gather'd leaves with listless will,  
Or moved adown the dappled green,  
Or look'd away with idle gaze  
Against the gold and purple haze.  
You might have heard red leaflets fall,  
The pheasant on the farther hill,  
A single, lonely, locust trill,  
Or sliding sable cricket call  
From out the grass, but that was all.

A wanderer of many lands  
Was I, a weary Ishmaelite,  
That knew the sign of lifted hands;  
Had seen the Crescent-mosques, had seen  
The Druid oaks of Aberdeen—

## AN INDIAN SUMMER

---

Recross'd the hilly seas, and saw  
The sable pines of Mackinaw,  
And lakes that lifted cold and white.

I saw the sweet Miami, saw  
The swift Ohio bent and roll'd  
Between his woody walls of gold,  
The Wabash banks of gray pawpaw,  
The Mississippi's ash; at morn  
Of autumn, when the oak is red,  
Saw slanting pyramids of corn,  
The level fields of spotted swine,  
The crooked lanes of lowing kine,  
And in the burning bushes saw  
The face of God, with bended head.

But when I saw her face, I said,  
"Earth has no fruits so fairly red  
As these that swing above my head;  
No purpled leaf, no poppi'd land,  
Like this that lies in reach of hand."

And, soft, unto myself I said:  
"O soul, inured to rue and rime,  
To barren toil and bitter bread,  
To biting rime, to bitter rue,  
Earth is not Nazareth; be good.  
O sacred Indian-summer time  
Of scarlet fruits, of fragrant wood,  
Of purpled clouds, of curling haze—  
O days of golden dreams, and days  
Of banish'd, vanish'd tawny men,  
Of martial songs of manly deeds—  
Be fair today, and bear me true."

## AN INDIAN SUMMER

We mounted, turn'd the sudden steeds  
Toward the yellow hills and flew.

My faith! but she rode fair, and she  
Had scarlet berries in her hair,  
And on her hands white starry stones.  
The satellites of many thrones  
Fall down before her gracious air  
In that full season. Fair to see  
Are pearly shells, red, virgin gold,  
And yellow fruits, and sun-down seas,  
And babes sun-brown; but all of these,  
And all fair things of sea besides,  
Before the matchless, manifold  
Accomplishments of her who rides  
With autumn summer in her hair,  
And knows her steed and holds her fair  
And stately in her stormy seat,  
They lie like playthings at her feet.

By heaven! she was more than fair,  
And more than good, and matchless wise,  
With all the lovelight in her eyes,  
And all the midnight in her hair.

Through leafy avenues and lanes,  
And lo! we climb'd the yellow hills,  
With russet leaves about the brows  
That reach'd from over-reaching trees.  
With purpled briars to the knees  
Of steeds that fretted foamy thews  
We turn'd to look a time below  
Beneath the ancient arch of boughs,  
That bent above us as a bow  
Of promise, bound in many hues.



## AN INDIAN SUMMER

I reach'd my hand. I could refuse  
All fruits but this, the touch of her  
At such a time. But lo! she lean'd  
With lifted face and soul, and 'leant  
As leans devoutest worshipper,  
Beyond the branches scarlet screen'd  
And look'd above me and beyond,  
So fix'd and silent, still and fond,  
She seem'd the while she look'd to lose  
Her very soul in such intent.  
She look'd on other things, but I,  
I saw nor scarlet leaf nor sky;  
I look'd on her, and only her.

Afar the city lay in smokes  
Of battle, and the martial strokes  
Of Progress thunder'd through the land  
And struck against the yellow trees,  
And roll'd in hollow echoes on  
Like sounding limits of the seas  
That smite the shelly shores at dawn.

Beyond, below, on either hand  
There reach'd a lake in belt of pine,  
A very dream; a distant dawn  
Asleep in all the autumn shine,  
Some like one of another land  
That I once laid a hand upon,  
And loved too well, and named as mine.

She sometimes touch'd with dimpl'd hand  
The drifting mane with dreamy air,  
She sometimes push'd aback her hair;  
But still she lean'd and look'd afar,  
As silent as the statues stand,—

## AN INDIAN SUMMER

For what? For falling leaf? For star  
That runs before the bride of death? . . .  
The elements were still; a breath  
Stirr'd not, the level western sun  
Pour'd in his arrows every one;  
Spill'd all his wealth of purpled red  
On velvet poplar leaf below,  
On arching chestnut overhead  
In all the hues of heaven's bow.

She sat the upper hill, and high.  
I spurr'd my black steed to her side;  
"The bow of promise, lo!" I cried,  
And lifted up my eyes to hers  
With all the fervid love that stirs  
The blood of men beneath the sun,  
And reach'd my hand, as one undone,  
In suppliance to hers above:  
"The bow of promise! give me love!  
I reach a hand, I rise or fall,  
Henceforth from this: put forth a hand  
From your high place and let me stand—  
Stand soul and body, white and tall!  
Why, I would live for you, would die  
Tomorrow, but to live today,  
Give me but love, and let me live  
To die before you. I can pray  
To only you, because I know,  
If you but give what I bestow,  
That God has nothing left to give."

Christ! still her stately head was raised,  
And still she silent sat and gazed  
Beyond the trees, beyond the town,  
To where the dimpled waters slept,

## AN INDIAN SUMMER

Nor splendid eyes once bended down  
To eyes that lifted up and wept.

She spake not, nor subdued her head  
To note a hand or heed a word;  
And then I question'd if she heard  
My life-tale on that leafy hill,  
Or any fervid word I said,  
And spoke with bold, vehement will.

She moved, and from her bridle hand  
She slowly drew the dainty glove,  
Then gazed again upon the land.  
The dimpled hand, a snowy dove  
Alit, and moved along the mane  
Of glossy skeins; then, overbold,  
It fell across the mane, and lay  
Before my eyes a sweet bouquet  
Of cluster'd kisses, white as snow.  
I should have seized it reaching so,  
But something bade me back,—a ban;  
Around the third fair finger ran  
A shining, hateful hoop of gold.

Ay, then I turn'd, I look'd away,  
I sudden felt forlorn and chill;  
I whistled, like, for want to say,  
And then I said, with bended head,  
"Another's ship from other shores,  
With richer freight, with fairer stores,  
Shall come to her some day instead";  
Then turn'd about,—and all was still.

Yea, you had chafed at this, and cried,  
And laugh'd with bloodless lips, and said

## AN INDIAN SUMMER

Some bitter things to sate your pride,  
And toss'd aloft a lordly head,  
And acted well some wilful lie,  
And, most like, cursed yourself—but I . . .  
Well, you be crucified, and you  
Be broken up with lances through  
The soul, then you may turn to find  
Some ladder-rounds in keenest rods,  
Some solace in the bitter rind,  
Some favor with the gods irate—  
The everlasting anger'd gods—  
And ask not overmuch of fate.

I was not born, was never bless'd,  
With cunning ways, nor wit, nor skill  
In woman's ways, nor words of love,  
Nor fashion'd suppliance of will.  
A very clown, I think, had guess'd  
How out of place and plain I seem'd;  
I, I, the idol-worshiper,  
Who saw nor maple leaves nor sky  
But took some touch and hue of her.

I am a pagan, heathen, lo!  
A savage man, of savage lands;  
Too quick to love, too slow to know  
The sign that tame love understands.

\* \* \* \* \*

Some heedless hoofs went sounding down  
The broken way. The woods were brown,  
And homely now; some idle talk  
Of folk and town; a broken walk;  
But sounding feet made song no more  
For me along that leafy shore.

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## AN INDIAN SUMMER

The sun caught up his gathered sheaves;  
A squirrel caught a nut and ran;  
A rabbit rustled in the leaves,  
A whirling bat, black-wing'd and tan,  
Blew swift between us; sullen night  
Fell down upon us; mottled kine,  
With lifted heads, went lowing down  
The rocky ridge toward the town,  
And all the woods grew dark as wine.

\* \* \* \* \*

Yea, bless'd Ohio's banks are fair;  
A sunny clime and good to touch,  
For tamer men of gentler mien,  
But as for me, another scene.  
A land below the Alps I know,  
Set well with grapes and girt with much  
Of woodland beauty; I shall share  
My rides by night below the light  
Of Mauna Loa, ride below  
The steep and starry Hebron height;  
Shall lift my hands in many lands,  
See South Sea palm, see Northland fir,  
See white-winged swans, see red-bill'd doves;  
See many lands and many loves,  
But never more the face of her.

And what her name or now the place  
Of her who makes my Mecca's prayer,  
Concerns you not; not any trace  
Of entrance to my temple's shrine  
Remains. The memory is mine,  
And none shall pass the portals there.

## AN INDIAN SUMMER

I see the gold and purple gleam  
Of autumn leaves, a reach of seas,  
A silent rider like a dream  
Moves by, a mist of mysteries,  
And these are mine, and only these,  
Yet they be more in my esteem,  
Than silver'd sails on corall'd seas.

The present! take it, hold it thine,  
But that one hour out from all  
The years that are, or yet shall fall,  
I pluck it out, I name it mine;  
That hour bound in sunny sheaves,  
With tassell'd shocks of golden shine,  
That hour wound in scarlet leaves,  
Is mine. I stretch a hand and swear  
An oath that breaks into a prayer;  
By heaven, it is wholly mine!

I wrote, or rather lived, this bit of color at Cleveland, Ohio, giving it the entire autumn of gold. The prime purpose was to get the atmosphere of an Ohio Saint Martin's summer, but it grew to be a very serious matter. Yet we must, in some sort at least, live what we write if what we write is to live.

## FROM SEA TO SEA

*Lol here sit we by the sun-down seas  
And the White Sierras. The sweet sea-breeze  
Is about us here; and a sky so fair  
Is bending above, so cloudless, blue,  
That you gaze and you gaze and you dream,  
and you  
See God and the portals of heaven there.*

Shake hands! kiss hands in haste to the sea,  
Where the sun comes in, and mount with me  
The matchless steed of the strong New World,  
As he champs and chafes with a strength  
untold,—  
And away to the West where the waves are  
curl'd,  
As they kiss white palms to the capes of gold!

A girth of brass and a breast of steel,  
A breath of flame and a flaming mane,  
An iron hoof and a steel-clad heel,  
A Mexican bit and a massive chain .  
Well tried and wrought in an iron rein;  
And away! away! with a shout and yell  
That had stricken a legion of old with fear,  
They had started the dead from their graves  
whilere,  
And startled the damn'd in hell as well.

Stand up! stand out! where the wind comes  
in  
And the wealth of the sea pours over you,  
As its health floods up to the face like wine,  
And a breath blows up from the Delaware

FROM SEA TO SEA

And the Susquehanna. We feel the might  
Of armies in us; the blood leaps through  
The frame with a fresh and a keen delight  
As the Alleghanies have kiss'd the hair,  
With a kiss blown far through the rush and din,  
By the chestnut burrs and through boughs of  
    pine.

O seas in a land! O lakes of mine!  
By the love I bear and the songs I bring  
Be glad with me! lift your waves and sing  
A song in the reeds that surround your isles!—  
A song of joy for this sun that smiles,  
For this land I love and this age and sign;  
For the peace that is and the perils pass'd;  
For the hope that is and the rest at last!

O heart of the world's heart! West! my  
    West!  
Look up! look out! There are fields of kine,  
There are clover-fields that are red as wine;  
And a world of kine in the fields take rest,  
As they ruminate in the shade of trees  
That are white with blossoms or brown with  
    bees.

There are emerald seas of corn and cane;  
There are isles of oak on the harvest plain,  
Where brawn men bend to the bending grain;  
There are temples of God and towns new born,  
And beautiful homes of beautiful brides;  
And the hearts of oak and the hands of horn  
Have fashion'd all these and a world be-  
    sides . . .



## FROM SEA TO SEA

A rush of rivers and a brush of trees,  
A breath blown far from the Mexican seas,  
And over the great heart-vein of earth!  
. . . By the South-Sun-land of the Cherokee,  
By the scalp-lock-lodge of the tall Pawnee,  
And up La Platte. What a weary dearth  
Of the homes of men! What a wild delight  
Of space! of room! What a sense of seas,  
Where the seas are not! What a salt-like  
breeze!  
What dust and taste of quick alkali!  
. . . Then hills! green, brown, then black like  
night,  
All fierce and defiant against the sky!

At last! at last! O steed new-born,  
Born strong of the will of the strong New  
World,  
We shoot to the summit, with the shafts of  
morn,  
On the mount of Thunder, where clouds are  
curl'd,  
Below in a splendor of the sun-clad seas.  
A kiss of welcome on the warm west breeze  
Blows up with a smell of the fragrant pine,  
And a faint, sweet fragrance from the far-off  
seas  
Comes in through the gates of the great South  
Pass,  
And thrills the soul like a flow of wine.  
The hare leaps low in the storm-bent grass,  
The mountain ram from his cliff looks back,  
The brown deer hies to the tamarack;  
And afar to the South with a sound of the main,  
Roll buffalo herds to the limitless plain. . . .

## FROM SEA TO SEA

On, on, o'er the summit; and onward again,  
And down like the sea-dove the billow enshrouds,  
And down like the swallow that dips to the sea,  
We dart and we dash and we quiver and we  
Are blowing to heaven white billows of clouds.

Thou "City of Saints!" O antique men,  
And men of the Desert as the men of old!  
Stand up! be glad! When the truths are told,  
When Time has utter'd his truths and when  
His hand has lifted the things to fame  
From the mass of things to be known no more,  
A monument set in the desert sand,  
A pyramid rear'd on an inland shore,  
And their architects shall have place and name.

The Humboldt desert and the alkaline land,  
And the seas of sage and of arid sand  
That stretch away till the strain'd eye carries  
The soul where the infinite spaces fill,  
Are far in the rear, and the fierce Sierras  
Are under our feet, and the hearts beat high  
And the blood comes quick; but the lips are  
still  
With awe and wonder, and all the will  
Is bow'd with a grandeur that frets the sky.

A flash of lakes through the fragrant trees,  
A song of birds and a sound of bees  
Above in the boughs of the sugar-pine.  
The pick-ax stroke in the placer mine,  
The boom of blasts in the gold-ribbed hills,  
The grizzly's growl in the gorge below  
Are dying away, and the sound of rills  
From the far-off shimmering crest of snow,

## FROM SEA TO SEA

---

The laurel green and the ivied oak,  
A yellow stream and a cabin's smoke,  
The brown bent hills and the shepherd's call,  
The hills of vine and of fruits, and all  
The sweets of Eden are here, and we  
Look out and afar to a limitless sea.

We have lived an age in a half-moon-wane!  
We have seen a world! We have chased the  
    sun  
From sea to sea; but the task is done.  
We here descend to the great white main—  
To the King of Seas, with its temples bare  
And a tropic breath on the brow and hair.

We are hush'd with wonder, we stand apart,  
We stand in silence; the heaving heart  
Fills full of heaven, and then the knees  
Go down in worship on the golden sands.  
With faces seaward, and with folded hands  
We gaze on the boundless, white Balboa seas.

This was written during my first railroad ride from New York to San Francisco, at a time when this was the greatest ride on the globe and parties came to California in great crowds to look upon the sundown seas. It is to be deplored that zeal and interest have so nearly perished with the novelty of the great journey.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

### PART I

*Rhyme on, rhyme on, in reedy flow,  
O river, rhymers ever sweet!  
The story of thy land is meet;  
The stars stand listening to know.*

*Rhyme on, O river of the earth!  
Gray father of the dreadful seas,  
Rhyme on! the world upon its knees  
Invokes thy songs, thy wealth, thy worth.*

*Rhyme on! the reed is at thy mouth,  
O kingly minstrel, mighty stream!  
Thy Crescent City, like a dream,  
Hangs in the heaven of my South.*

*Rhyme on, rhyme on! these broken strings  
Sing sweetest in this warm south wind;  
I sit thy willow banks and bind  
A broken harp that fitful sings.*

### I

And where is my silent, sweet blossom-sown  
town?  
And where is her glory, and what has she done?  
By her Mexican seas in the path of the sun,  
Sit you down; in her crescent of seas, sit you  
down.

Aye, glory enough by her Mexican seas!  
Aye, story enough in that battle-torn town,

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

Hidden down in her crescent of seas, hidden  
down  
In her mantle and sheen of magnolia-white  
trees.

But mine is the story of souls; of a soul  
That barter'd God's limitless kingdom for  
gold,—  
Sold stars and all space for a thing he did hold  
In his palm for a day; and then hid with the  
mole:

Sad soul of a rose-land, of moss-mantled  
oak—  
Gray, Druid-old oaks; and the moss that sways  
And swings in the wind is the battle-smoke  
Of duelists dead, in her storied days:

Sad soul of a love-land, of church-bells and  
chimes;  
A love-land of altars and orange-flowers;  
And that is the reason for all these rhymes—  
That church-bells are ringing through all these  
hours!

This sun-land has churches, has priests at  
prayer,  
White nuns, that are white as the far north  
snow:  
They go where duty may bid them go,—  
They dare when the angel of death is there.

This love-land has ladies, so fair, so fair,  
In their Creole quarter, with great black eyes—

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

So fair that the Mayor must keep them there  
Lest troubles, like troubles of Troy, arise.

This sun-land has ladies with eyes held down,  
Held down, because if they lifted them,  
Why, you would be lost in that old French town,  
Though even you held to God's garment hem.

This love-land has ladies so fair, so fair,  
That they bend their eyes to the holy book,  
Lest you should forget yourself, your prayer,  
And never more cease to look and to look.

And these are the ladies that no men see,  
And this is the reason men see them not;  
Better their modest, sweet mystery—  
Better by far than red battle-shot.

And so, in this curious old town of tiles,  
The proud French quarter of days long gone,  
In castles of Spain and tumble-down piles,  
These wonderful ladies live on and on.

I sit in the church where they come and go;  
I dream of glory that has long since gone;  
Of the low raised high, of the high brought  
low  
As in battle-torn days of Napoleon.

These brass-plaited places, so rich, so poor!  
One quaint old church at the edge of the town  
Has white tombs laid to the very church door—  
White leaves in the story of life turn'd down:

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

White leaves in the story of life are these,  
The low, white slabs in the long, strong grass,  
Where glory has emptied her hour-glass,  
And dreams with the dreamers beneath the trees.

I dream with the dreamers beneath the sod,  
Where souls pass by to the great white throne;  
I count each tomb as a mute mile-stone  
For weary, sweet souls on their way to God.

I sit all day by the vast, strong stream,  
'Mid low white slabs in the long, strong grass,  
Where time has forgotten for aye to pass,  
To dream, and ever to dream and to dream.

This quaint old church, with its dead to the  
door,  
By the cypress swamp at the edge of the town,  
So restful it seems that you want to sit down  
And rest you, and rest you for evermore.

### III

The azure curtain of God's house  
Draws back, and hangs star-pinned to space;  
I hear the low, large moon arouse,  
And slowly lift her languid face.

I see her shoulder up the east,  
Low-necked, and large as womanhood—  
Low-necked, as for some ample feast  
Of gods, within yon orange-wood.

She spreads white palms, she whispers peace,—  
Sweet peace on earth forevermore;

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

Sweet peace for two beneath the trees,  
Sweet peace for one within the door.

The bent stream, as God's scimitar,  
Flashed in the sun, sweeps on and on,  
Till sheathed, like some great sword new-drawn,  
In seas beneath the Carib's star.

The high moon climbs the sapphire hill,  
The lone sweet lady prays within;  
The crickets keep such clang and din—  
They are so loud, earth is so still!

And two men glare in silence there!  
The bitter, jealous hate of each  
Has grown too deep for deed or speech—  
The lone sweet lady keeps her prayer.

The vast moon high through heaven's field  
In circling chariot is rolled;  
The golden stars are spun and reeled,  
And woven into cloth of gold.

The white magnolia fills the night  
With perfume, as the proud moon fills  
The glad earth with her ample light  
From out her awful sapphire hills.

White orange-blossoms fill the boughs  
Above, about the old church-door;  
They wait the bride, the bridal vows,—  
They never hung so fair before.

The two men glare as dark as sin!  
And yet all seem so fair, so white,



## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

You would not reckon it was night,—  
The while the lady prays within.

### IV

She prays so very long and late,—  
The two men, weary, waiting there,—  
The great magnolia at the gate  
Bends drowsily above her prayer.

The cypress in his cloak of moss,  
That watches on in silent gloom,  
Has leaned and shaped a shadow cross  
Above the nameless, lowly tomb.

\* \* \* \* \*

What can she pray for? What her sin?  
What folly of a maid so fair?  
What shadows bind the wondrous hair  
Of one who prays so long within?

The palm-trees guard in regiment,  
Stand right and left without the gate;  
The myrtle-moss trees wait and wait;  
The tall magnolia leans intent.

The cypress-trees, on gnarled old knees,  
Far out the dank and marshy deep  
Where slimy monsters groan and creep,  
Kneel with her in their marshy seas.

What can her sin be? Who shall know?  
The night flies by,—a bird on wing;  
The men no longer to and fro  
Stride up and down, or anything.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

For one, so weary and so old,  
Has hardly strength to stride or stir;  
He can but hold his bags of gold,—  
But hug his gold and wait for her.

The two stand still,—stand face to face.  
The moon slides on, the midnight air  
Is perfumed as a house of prayer,—  
The maiden keeps her holy place.

Two men! And one is gray, but one  
Scarce lifts a full-grown face as yet;  
With light foot on life's threshold set,—  
Is he the other's sun-born son?

And one is of the land of snow,  
And one is of the land of sun;  
A black-eyed, burning youth is one,  
But one has pulses cold and slow:

Aye, cold and slow from clime of snow  
Where Nature's bosom, icy bound,  
Holds all her forces, hard, profound,—  
Holds close where all the South lets go.

Blame not the sun, blame not the snows,—  
God's great schoolhouse for all is clime;  
The great school teacher, Father Time,  
And each has borne as best he knows.

At last the elder speaks,—he cries,—  
He speaks as if his heart would break;  
He speaks out as a man that dies,—  
As dying for some lost love's sake:

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

"Come, take this bag of gold, and go!  
Come, take one bag! See, I have two!  
Oh, why stand silent, staring so,  
When I would share my gold with you?"

"Come, take this gold! See how I pray!  
See how I bribe, and beg, and buy,—  
Aye, buy! and beg, as you, too, may  
Some day before you come to die.

"God! take this gold, I beg, I pray!  
I beg as one who thirsting cries  
For but one drop of drink, and dies  
In some lone, loveless desert way.

"You hesitate? Still hesitate?  
Stand silent still and mock my pain?  
Still mock to see me wait and wait,  
And wait her love, as earth waits rain?"

### V

O broken ship! O starless shore!  
O black and everlasting night!  
Where love comes never any more  
To light man's way with heaven's light.

A godless man with bags of gold  
I think a most unholy sight;  
Ah, who so desolate at night,  
Amid death's sleepers still and cold?

A godless man on holy ground  
I think a most unholy sight.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

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I hear death trailing, like a hound,  
Hard after him, and swift to bite.

### VI

The vast moon settles to the west;  
Yet still two men beside that tomb,  
And one would sit thereon to rest,—  
Aye, rest below, if there were room.

### VII

What is this rest of death, sweet friend?  
What is the rising up, and where?  
I say, death is a lengthened prayer,  
A longer night, a larger end.

Hear you the lesson I once learned:  
I died; I sailed a million miles  
Through dreamful, flowery, restful isles,—  
She was not there, and I returned.

I say the shores of death and sleep  
Are one; that when we, wearied, come  
To Lethe's waters, and lie dumb,  
'Tis death, not sleep, holds us to keep.

Yea, we lie dead for need of rest,  
And so the soul drifts out and o'er  
The vast still waters to the shore  
Beyond, in pleasant, tranquil quest:

It sails straight on, forgetting pain,  
Past isles of peace, to perfect rest,—  
Now were it best abide, or best  
Return and take up life again?

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

And that is all of death there is,  
Believe me. If you find your love  
In that far land, then, like the dove,  
Pluck olive boughs, nor back to this.

But if you find your love not there;  
Or if your feet feel sure, and you  
Have still allotted work to do,—  
Why, then haste back to toil and care.

Death is no mystery. 'Tis plain  
If death be mystery, then sleep  
Is mystery thrice strangely deep,—  
For oh, this coming back again!

Austerest ferryman of souls!  
I see the gleam of shining shores;  
I hear thy steady stroke of oars  
Above the wildest wave that rolls.

O Charon, keep thy somber ships!  
I come, with neither myrrh nor balm,  
Nor silver piece in open palm,—  
Just lone, white silence on my lips.

### VIII

She prays so long! she prays so late!  
What sin in all this flower land  
Against her supplicating hand  
Could have in heaven any weight?

Prays she for her sweet self alone?  
Prays she for some one far away,

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

Or some one near and dear today,  
Or some poor lorn, lost soul unknown?

It seems to me a selfish thing  
To pray forever for one's self;  
It seems to me like heaping pelf,  
In heaven by hard reckoning.

Why, I would rather stoop and bear  
My load of sin, and bear it well  
And bravely down to your hard hell,  
Than pray and pray a selfish prayer!

### IX

The swift chameleon in the gloom—  
This gray morn silence so profound!—  
Forsakes its bough, glides to the ground,  
Then up, and lies across the tomb.

It erst was green as olive-leaf;  
It then grew gray as myrtle moss  
The time it slid the tomb across;  
And now 't is marble-white as grief.

The little creature's hues are gone  
Here in the gray and ghostly light;  
It lies so pale, so panting white,—  
White as the tomb it lies upon.

The two still by that nameless tomb!  
And both so still! You might have said,  
These two men, they are also dead,  
And only waiting here for room.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

How still beneath the orange-bough!  
How tall was one, how bowed was one!  
The one was as a journey done,  
The other as beginning now.

And one was young,—young with that youth  
Eternal that belongs to truth;  
And one was old,—old with the years  
That follow fast on doubts and fears.

And yet the habit of command  
Was his, in every stubborn part;  
No common knave was he at heart,  
Nor his the common coward's hand.

He looked the young man in the face,  
So full of hate, so frank of hate;  
The other, standing in his place,  
Stared back as straight and hard as fate.

And now he sudden turned away,  
And now he paced the path, and now  
Came back beneath the orange bough,  
Pale-browed, with lips as cold as clay.

As mute as shadows on a wall,  
As silent still, as dark as they,  
Before that stranger, bent and gray,  
The youth stood scornful, proud and tall.

He stood a clean palmetto tree  
With Spanish daggers guarding it;  
Nor deed, nor word, to him seemed fit  
While she prayed on so silently.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

He slew his rival with his eyes  
His eyes were daggers piercing deep,—  
So deep that blood began to creep  
From their deep wounds and drop wordwise.

His eyes so black, so bright, that they  
Might raise the dead, the living slay,  
If but the dead, the living bore  
Such hearts as heroes had of yore.

Two deadly arrows barbed in black,  
And feathered, too, with raven's wing;  
Two arrows that could silent sting,  
And with a death-wound answer back.

How fierce he was! how deadly still  
In that mesmeric, searching stare  
Turned on the pleading stranger there  
That drew to him, despite his will!

So like a bird down-fluttering,  
Down, down, beneath a snake's bright eyes,  
He stood, a fascinated thing,  
That hopeless, unresisting, dies.

He raised a hard hand as before,  
Reached out the gold, and offered it  
With hand that shook as ague-fit,—  
The while the youth but scorned the more.

"You will not touch it? In God's name,  
Who are you, and what are you, then?  
Come, take this gold, and be of men,—  
A human form with human aim.



## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

"Yea, take this gold,—she must be mine!  
She shall be mine! I do not fear  
Your scowl, your scorn, your soul austere,  
The living, dead, or your dark sign.

"I saw her as she entered there;  
I saw her, and uncovered stood;  
The perfume of her womanhood  
Was holy incense on the air.

"She left behind sweet sanctity,  
Religion went the way she went;  
I cried I would repent, repent!  
She passed on, all unheeding me.

"Her soul is young, her eyes are bright  
And gladsome, as mine own are dim;  
But oh, I felt my senses swim  
The time she passed me by tonight!—

"The time she passed, nor raised her eyes  
To hear me cry I would repent,  
Nor turned her head to hear my cries,  
But swifter went the way she went,—

"Went swift as youth, for all these years!  
And this the strangest thing appears,  
That lady there seems just the same,—  
Sweet Gladys—Ah! you know her name?

"You hear her name and start that I  
Should name her dear name trembling so?  
Why, boy, when I shall come to die  
That name shall be the last I know.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

"That name shall be the last sweet name  
My lips shall utter in this life!  
That name is brighter than bright flame,—  
That lady is mine own sweet wife!

"Ah, start and catch your burning breath!  
Ah, start and clutch your deadly knife!  
If this be death, then be it death,—  
But that loved lady is my wife!

"Yea, you are stunned! your face is white,  
That I should come confronting you,  
As comes a lorn ghost of the night  
From out the past, and to pursue.

"You thought me dead? You shake your  
head,  
You start back horrified to know  
That she is loved, that she is wed,  
That you have sinned in loving so.

"Yet what seems strange, that lady there,  
Housed in the holy house of prayer,  
Seems just the same for all her tears,—  
For all my absent twenty years.

"Yea, twenty years tonight, tonight,—  
Just twenty years this day, this hour,  
Since first I plucked that perfect flower,  
And not one witness of the rite.

"Nay, do not doubt,—I tell you true!  
Her prayers, her tears, her constancy  
Are all for me, are all for me,—  
And not one single thought for you!

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

"I knew, I knew she would be here  
This night of nights to pray for me!  
And how could I for twenty year  
Know this same night so certainly?

"Ah me! some thoughts that we would drown,  
Stick closer than a brother to  
The conscience, and pursue, pursue,  
Like baying hound, to hunt us down.

"And, then, that date is history;  
For on that night this shore was shelled,  
And many a noble mansion felled,  
With many a noble family.

"I wore the blue; I watched the flight  
Of shells, like stars tossed through the air  
To blow your hearth-stones—anywhere,  
That wild, illuminated night.

"Nay, rage befits you not so well;  
Why, you were but a babe at best;  
Your cradle some sharp bursted shell  
That tore, maybe, your mother's breast!

"Hear me! We came in honored war.  
The risen world was on your track!  
The whole North-land was at our back,  
From Hudson's bank to the North Star!

"And from the North to palm-set sea  
The splendid fiery cyclone swept.  
Your fathers fell, your mothers wept,  
Their nude babes clinging to the knee.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

"A wide and desolated track:  
Behind, a path of ruin lay;  
Before, some women by the way  
Stood mutely gazing, clad in black.

"From silent women waiting there  
White tears came down like still, small rain;  
Their own sons of the battle-plain  
Were now but viewless ghosts of air.

"Their own dear, daring boys in gray,—  
They should not see them any more;  
Our cruel drums kept telling o'er  
The time their own sons went away.

"Through burning town, by bursting shell—  
Yea, I remember well that night;  
I led through orange-lanes of light,  
As through some hot outpost of hell!

"That night of rainbow shot and shell  
Sent from yon surging river's breast  
To waken me, no more to rest,—  
That night I should remember well!

"That night, amid the maimed and dead—  
A night in history set down  
By light of many a burning town,  
And written all across in red,—

"Her father dead, her brothers dead,  
Her home in flames,—what else could she  
But fly all helpless here to me,  
A fluttered dove, that night of dread?

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

"Short time, hot time had I to woo  
Amid the red shells battle-chime;  
But women rarely reckon time,  
And perils waken love anew.

"Aye, then I wore a captain's sword;  
And, too, had oftentimes before  
Doffed cap at her dead father's door,  
And passed a lover's pleasant word.

"And then—ah, I was comely then!  
I bore no load upon my back,  
I heard no hounds upon my track,  
But stood the tallest of tall men.

"Her father's and her mother's shrine,  
This church amid the orange-wood;  
So near and so secure it stood,  
It seemed to beckon as a sign.

"Its white cross seemed to beckon me;  
My heart was strong, and it was mine  
To throw myself upon my knee,  
To beg to lead her to this shrine.

"She did consent. Through lanes of light  
I led through this church-door that night—  
Let fall your hand! Take back your face  
And stand,—stand patient in your place!

"She loved me; and she loves me still.  
Yea, she clung close to me that hour  
As honey-bee to honey-flower,—  
And still is mine through good or ill.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

"The priest stood there. He spake the prayer;  
He made the holy, mystic sign,  
And she was mine, was wholly mine,—  
Is mine this moment, I can swear!

"Then days, then nights of vast delight,—  
Then came a doubtful later day;  
The faithful priest, nor far away,  
Watched with the dying in the fight:

"The priest amid the dying, dead,  
Kept duty on the battle-field,—  
That midnight marriage unrevealed  
Kept strange thoughts running thro' my head.

"At last a stray ball struck the priest;  
This vestibule his chancel was;  
And now none lived to speak her cause,  
Record, or champion her the least.

"Hear me! I had been bred to hate  
All priests, their mummeries and all.  
Ah, it was fate,—ah, it was fate  
That all things tempted to my fall!

"And then the dashing songs we sang  
Those nights when rudely reveling,—  
Such songs that only soldiers sing,—  
Until the very tent-poles rang!

"What is the rhyme that rhymers say,  
Of maidens born to be betrayed  
By epaulettes and shining blade,  
While soldiers love and ride away?

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

"And then my comrades spake her name  
Half taunting, with a touch of shame;  
Taught me to hold that lily-flower  
As some light pastime of the hour.

"And then the ruin in the land,  
The death, dismay, the lawlessness!  
Men gathered gold on every hand,—  
Heaped gold: and why should I do less?

"The cry for gold was in the air,—  
For Creole gold, for precious things;  
The sword kept prodding here and there,  
Through bolts and sacred fastenings.

"'Get gold! get gold!' This was the cry.  
And I loved gold. What else could I  
Or you, or any earnest one,  
Born in this getting age, have done?

"With this one lesson taught from youth,  
And ever taught us, to get gold,—  
To get and hold, and ever hold,—  
What else could I have done, forsooth?

"She, seeing how I crazed for gold,—  
This girl, my wife, one late night told  
Of treasures hidden close at hand,  
In her dead father's mellow land;

"Of gold she helped her brothers hide  
Beneath a broad banana-tree  
The day the two in battle died,  
The night she, dying, fled to me.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

"It seemed too good ; I laughed to scorn  
Her trustful tale. She answered not ;  
But meekly on the morrow morn  
These two great bags of bright gold brought.

"And when she brought this gold to me,—  
Red Creole gold, rich, rare, and old,—  
When I at last had gold, sweet gold,  
I cried in very ecstasy.

"Red gold ! rich gold ! two bags of gold !  
The two stout bags of gold she brought  
And gave, with scarce a second thought,—  
Why, her two hands could scarcely hold !

"Now I had gold ! two bags of gold !  
Two wings of gold, to fly, and fly  
The wide world's girth ; red gold to hold  
Against my heart for aye and aye !

"My country's lesson : 'Gold ! get gold !'  
I learned it well in land of snow ;  
And what can glow, so brightly glow,  
Long winter nights of northern cold ?

"Aye, now at last, at last I had  
The one thing, all fair things above,  
My land had taught me most to love !  
A miser now ! and I grew mad.

"With these two bags of gold my own,  
I soon began to plan some night  
For flight, for far and sudden flight,—  
For flight ; and, too, for flight alone.



## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

"I feared! I feared! My heart grew cold,—  
Some one might claim this gold of me!  
I feared her,—feared her purity—  
Feared all things but my bags of gold.

"I grew to hate her face, her creed,—  
That face the fairest ever yet  
That bowed o'er holy cross or bead,  
Or yet was in God's image set.

"I fled,—nay, not so knavish low,  
As you have fancied, did I fly:  
I sought her at this shrine, and I  
Told her full frankly I should go.

"I stood a giant in my power,—  
And did she question or dispute?  
I stood a savage, selfish brute,—  
She bowed her head, a lily-flower.

"And when I sudden turned to go,  
And told her I should come no more,  
She bowed her head so low, so low,  
Her vast black hair fell pouring o'er.

"And that was all; her splendid face  
Was mantled from me, and her night  
Of hair half hid her from my sight,  
As she fell moaning in her place.

"And there, through her dark night of hair,  
She sobbed, low moaning in her tears,  
That she would wait, wait all the years,—  
Would wait and pray in her despair.

A SONG OF THE SOUTH

"Nay, did not murmur, not deny,—  
She did not cross me one sweet word!  
I turned and fled; I thought I heard  
A night-bird's piercing low death-cry!"



## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

### PART II.

*How soft the moonlight of my South!  
How sweet the South in soft moonlight!  
I want to kiss her warm, sweet mouth  
As she lies sleeping here tonight.*

*How still! I do not hear a mouse.  
I see some bursting buds appear;  
I hear God in his garden,—hear  
Him trim some flowers for His house.*

*I hear some singing stars; the mouth  
Of my vast river sings and sings,  
And pipes on reeds of pleasant things,—  
Of splendid promise for my South:*

*My great South-woman, soon to rise  
And tiptoe up and loose her hair;  
Tiptoe, and take from out the skies  
God's stars and glorious moon to wear!*

### I

The poet shall create or kill,  
Bid heroes live, bid braggarts die.  
I look against a lurid sky,—  
My silent South lies proudly still.

The fading light of burning lands  
Still climbs to God's house overhead;  
Mute women wring white, withered hands;  
Their eyes are red, their skies are red.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

And we still boast our bitter wars!  
Still burn and boast, and boast and lie  
But God's white finger spins the stars  
In calm dominion of the sky.

And not one ray of light the less  
Comes down to bid the grasses spring;  
No drop of dew nor anything  
Shall fail for all our bitterness.

If man grows large, is God the less?  
The moon shall rise and set the same,  
The great sun spill his splendid flame,  
And clothe the world in queenliness.

Yea, from that very blood-soaked sod  
Some large-souled, seeing youth shall come  
Some day, and he shall not be dumb  
Before the awful court of God.

## II

The weary moon had turned away,  
The far North Star was turning pale  
To hear the stranger's boastful tale  
Of blood and flame that battle-day.

And yet again the two men glared,  
Close face to face above that tomb;  
Each seemed as jealous of the room  
The other, eager waiting shared.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

Again the man began to say,—  
As taking up some broken thread,  
As talking to the patient dead,—  
The Creole was as still as they:

“That night we burned yon grass-grown  
town,—  
The grasses, vines are reaching up;  
The ruins they are reaching down,  
As sun-browned soldiers when they sup.

“I knew her,—knew her constancy.  
She said this night of every year  
She here would come, and kneeling here,  
Would pray the livelong night for me.

“This praying seems a splendid thing!  
It drives old Time the other way;  
It makes him lose all reckoning  
Of years that I have had to pay.

“This praying seems a splendid thing!  
It makes me stronger as she prays—  
But oh, those bitter, bitter days,  
When I became a banished thing!

“I fled, took ship,—I fled as far  
As far ships drive tow’rd the North Star:  
For I did hate the South, the sun  
That made me think what I had done.

“I could not see a fair palm-tree  
In foreign land, in pleasant place,  
But it would whisper of her face  
And shake its keen, sharp blades at me.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

"Each black-eyed woman would recall  
A lone church-door, a face, a name,  
A coward's flight, a soldier's shame:  
I fled from woman's face, from all.

"I hugged my gold, my precious gold,  
Within my strong, stout buckskin vest.  
I wore my bags against my breast  
So close I felt my heart grow cold.

"I did not like to see it now;  
I did not spend one single piece;  
I traveled, traveled without cease  
As far as Russian ship could plow.

"And when my own scant hoard was gone,  
And I had reached the far North-land,  
I took my two stout bags in hand  
As one pursued, and journeyed on.

"Ah, I was weary! I grew gray;  
I felt the fast years slip and reel,  
As slip bright beads when maidens kneel  
At altars when outdoor is gay.

"At last I fell prone in the road,—  
Fell fainting with my cursed load.  
A skin-clad Cossack helped me bear  
My bags, nor would one shilling share.

"He looked at me with proud disdain,—  
He looked at me as if he knew;  
His black eyes burned me thro' and thro';  
His scorn pierced like a deadly pain.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

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"He frightened me with honesty;  
He made me feel so small, so base,  
I fled, as if a fiend kept chase,—  
A fiend that claimed my company!

"I bore my load alone; I crept  
Far up the steep and icy way;  
And there, before a cross there lay  
A barefoot priest, who bowed and wept.

"I threw my gold right down and sped  
Straight on. And oh, my heart was light!  
A springtime bird in springtime flight  
Flies scarce more happy than I fled.

"I felt somehow this monk would take  
My gold, my load from off my back;  
Would turn the fiend from off my track,  
Would take my gold for sweet Christ's sake!

"I fled; I did not look behind;  
I fled, fled with the mountain wind.  
At last, far down the mountain's base  
I found a pleasant resting-place.

"I rested there so long, so well,  
More grateful than all tongues can tell.  
It was such pleasant thing to hear  
That valley's voices calm and clear:

"That valley veiled in mountain air,  
With white goats on the hills at morn;  
That valley green with seas of corn,  
With cottage-islands here and there.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

"I watched the mountain girls. The hay  
They mowed was not more sweet than they;  
They laid brown hands in my white hair;  
They marveled at my face of care.

"I tried to laugh; I could but weep.  
I made these peasants one request,—  
That I with them might toil or rest,  
And with them sleep the long, last sleep.

"I begged that I might battle there,  
In that fair valley-land, for those  
Who gave me cheer, when girt with foes,  
And have a country loved as fair.

"Where is that spot that poets name  
Our country? name the hallowed land?  
Where is that spot where man must stand  
Or fall when girt with sworn and flame?

"Where is that one permitted spot?  
Where is the one place man must fight?  
Where rests the one God-given right  
To fight, as ever patriots fought?

"I say 'tis in that holy house  
Where God first set us down on earth;  
Where mother welcomed us at birth,  
And bared her breasts, a happy spouse.

"The simple plowboy from his field  
Looks forth. He sees God's purple wall  
Encircling him. High over all  
The vast sun wheels his shining shield.



## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

"This King, who makes earth what it is,—  
King David bending to his toil!  
O Lord and master of the soil,  
How envied in thy loyal bliss!

"Long live the land we loved in youth  
That world with blue skies bent about,  
Where never entered ugly doubt!  
Long live the simple, homely truth!

"Can true hearts love some far snow-land,  
Some bleak Alaska bought with gold?  
God's laws are old as love is old;  
And Home is something near at hand.

"Yea, change yon river's course; estrange  
The seven sweet stars; make hate divide  
The full moon from the flowing tide,—  
But this old truth ye cannot change.

"I begged a land as begging bread;  
I begged of these brave mountaineers  
To share their sorrows, share their tears;  
To weep as they wept with their dead.

"They did consent. The mountain town  
Was mine to love, and valley lands.  
That night the barefoot monk came down  
And laid my two bags in my hands!

"On! on! And oh, the load I bore!  
Why, once I dreamed my soul was lead;  
Dreamed once it was a body dead!  
It made my cold, hard bosom sore.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

"I dragged that body forth and back—  
O conscience, what a baying hound!  
Nor frozen seas nor frosted ground  
Can throw this bloodhound from his track.

"In farthest Russia I lay down,  
A dying man, at last to rest;  
I felt such load upon my breast  
As seamen feel, who, sinking, drown.

"That night, all chill and desperate,  
I sprang up, for I could not rest;  
I tore the two bags from my breast,  
And dashed them in the burning grate.

"I then crept back into my bed;  
I tried, I begged, I prayed to sleep;  
But those red, restless coins would keep  
Slow dropping, dropping, and blood-red.

"I heard them clink, and clink, and clink,—  
They turned, they talked within that grate.  
They talked of her; they made me think  
Of one who still did pray and wait.

"And when the bags burned crisp and black,  
Two coins did start, roll to the floor,—  
Roll out, roll on, and then roll back,  
As if they needs must journey more.

"Ah, then I knew nor change nor space,  
Nor all the drowning years that rolled  
Could hide from me her haunting face,  
Nor still that red-tongued, talking gold!

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

"Again I sprang forth from my bed!  
I shook as in an ague fit;  
I clutched that red gold, burning red,  
I clutched as if to strangle it.

"I clutched it up—you hear me, boy?—  
I clutched it up with joyful tears!  
I clutched it close with such wild joy  
I had not felt for years and years!

"Such joy! for I should now retrace  
My steps, should see my land, her face;  
Bring back her gold this battle-day,  
And see her, hear her, hear her pray!

"I brought it back—you hear me, boy?  
I clutch it, hold it, hold it now;  
Red gold, bright gold that giveth joy  
To all, and anywhere or how;

"That giveth joy to all but me,—  
To all but me, yet soon to all.  
It burns my hands, it burns! but she  
Shall ope my hands and let it fall.

"For oh, I have a willing hand  
To give these bags of gold; to see  
Her smile as once she smiled on me  
Here in this pleasant warm palm-land."

He ceased, he thrust each hard-clenched fist,—  
He threw his gold hard forth again,  
As one impelled by some mad pain  
He would not or could not resist.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

The Creole, scorning, turned away,  
As if he turned from that lost thief,—  
The one who died without belief  
That dark, dread crucifixion day.

### III

Believe in man nor turn away.  
Lo! man advances year by year;  
Time bears him upward, and his sphere  
Of life must broaden day by day.

Believe in man with large belief;  
The garnered grain each harvest-time  
Hath promise, roundness, and full prime  
For all the empty chaff and sheaf.

Believe in man with brave belief;  
Truth keeps the bottom of her well;  
And when the thief peeps down, the thief  
Peeps back at him perpetual.

Faint not that this or that man fell;  
For one that falls a thousand rise  
To lift white Progress to the skies:  
Truth keeps the bottom of her well.

Fear not for man, nor cease to delve  
For cool, sweet truth, with large belief.  
Lo! Christ himself chose only twelve,  
Yet one of these turned out a thief.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

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### IV

Down through the dark magnolia leaves,  
Where climbs the rose of Cherokee  
Against the orange-blossomed tree,  
A loom of morn-light weaves and weaves,—

A loom of morn-light, weaving clothes  
From snow-white rose of Cherokee,  
And bridal blooms of orange-tree,  
For fairy folk housed in red rose.

Down through the mournful myrtle crape,  
Thro' moving moss, thro' ghostly gloom,  
A long, white morn-beam takes a shape  
Above a nameless, lowly tomb;

A long white finger through the gloom  
Of grasses gathered round about,—  
As God's white finger pointing out  
A name upon that nameless tomb.

### V

Her white face bowed in her black hair,  
The maiden prays so still within  
That you might hear a falling pin, —  
Aye, hear her white, unuttered prayer.

The moon has grown disconsolate,  
Has turned her down her walk of stars:  
Why, she is shutting up her bars,  
As maidens shut a lover's gate.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

The moon has grown disconsolate;  
She will no longer watch and wait.  
But two men wait; and two men will  
Wait on till full morn, mute and still.

Still wait and walk among the trees  
Quite careless if the moon may keep  
Her walk along her starry steep  
Or drown her in the Southern seas.

They know no moon, or set or rise  
Of sun, or anything to light  
The earth or skies, save her dark eyes,  
This praying, waking, watching night.

They move among the tombs apart,  
Their eyes turn ever to that door;  
They know the worn walks there by heart—  
They turn and walk them o'er and o'er.

They are not wide, these little walks  
For dead folk by this crescent town:  
They lie right close when they lie down,  
As if they kept up quiet talks.

## VI

The two men keep their paths apart;  
But more and more begins to stoop  
The man with gold, as droop and droop  
Tall plants with something at their heart.

Now once again, with eager zest,  
He offers gold with silent speech;

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

The other will not walk in reach,  
But walks around, as round a pest.

His dark eyes sweep the scene around,  
His young face drinks the fragrant air,  
His dark eyes journey everywhere,—  
The other's cleave unto the ground.

It is a weary walk for him,  
For oh, he bears such weary load!  
He does not like that narrow road  
Between the dead—it is so dim:

It is so dark, that narrow place,  
Where graves lie thick, like yellow leaves:  
Give us the light of Christ and grace;  
Give light to garner in the sheaves.

Give light of love; for gold is cold,—  
Aye, gold is cruel as a crime;  
It gives no light at such sad time  
As when man's feet wax weak and old.

Aye, gold is heavy, hard, and cold!  
And have I said this thing before?  
Well, I will say it o'er and o'er,  
'T were need be said ten thousand fold.

"Give us this day our daily bread,"—  
Get this of God; then all the rest  
Is housed in thine own earnest breast,  
If you but lift an honest head.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

### VII

Oh, I have seen men tall and fair,  
Stoop down their manhood with disgust,—  
Stoop down God's image to the dust,  
To get a load of gold to bear:

Have seen men selling day by day  
The glance of manhood that God gave:  
To sell God's image, as a slave  
Might sell some little pot of clay!

Behold! here in this green graveyard  
A man with gold enough to fill  
A coffin, as a miller's till;  
And yet his path is hard, so hard!

His feet keep sinking in the sand,  
And now so near an opened grave!  
He seems to hear the solemn wave  
Of dread oblivion at hand.

The sands, they grumble so, it seems  
As if he walks some shelving brink;  
He tries to stop, he tries to think,  
He tries to make believe he dreams:

Why, he was free to leave the land,—  
The silver moon was white as dawn;  
Why, he had gold in either hand,  
Had silver ways to walk upon.

And who should chide, or bid him stay?  
Or taunt, or threat, or bid him fly?



## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

"The world's for sale," I hear men say,  
And yet this man had gold to buy.

Buy what? Buy rest? He could not rest!  
Buy gentle sleep? He could not sleep,  
Though all these graves were wide and deep  
As their wide mouths with the request.

Buy Love, buy faith, buy snow-white truth?  
Buy moonlight, sunlight, present, past?  
Buy but one brimful cup of youth  
That true souls drink of to the last?

O God! 'twas pitiful to see  
This miser so forlorn and old!  
O God! how poor a man may be  
With nothing in this world but gold!

### VIII

The broad magnolia's blooms were white;  
Her blooms were large, as if the moon  
Quite lost her way that dreamful night,  
And lodged to wait the afternoon.

Oh, vast white blossoms, breathing love!  
White bosom of my lady dead,  
In your white heaven overhead  
I look, and learn to look above.

### IX

The dew-wet roses wept; their eyes  
All dew, their breath as sweet as prayer.

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## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

And as they wept, the dead down there  
Did feel their tears and hear their sighs.

The grass uprose, as if afraid  
Some stranger foot might press too near;  
Its every blade was like a spear,  
Its every spear a living blade.

The grass above that nameless tomb  
Stood all arrayed, as if afraid  
Some weary pilgrim, seeking room  
And rest, might lay where she was laid.

### X

'T was morn, and yet it was not morn;  
'T was morn in heaven, not on earth:  
A star was singing of a birth,—  
Just saying that a day was born.

The marsh hard by that bound the lake,—  
The great stork sea-lake, Ponchartrain,  
Shut off from sultry Cuban main,—  
Drew up its legs, as half awake:

Drew long, thin legs, stork-legs that steep  
In slime where alligators creep,—  
Drew long, green legs that stir the grass,  
As when the lost, lorn night winds pass.

Then from the marsh came croakings low;  
Then louder croaked some sea-marsh beast;  
Then, far away against the east,  
God's rose of morn began to grow.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

From out the marsh against that east,  
A ghostly moss-swept cypress stood;  
With ragged arms, above the wood  
It rose, a God-forsaken beast.

It seemed so frightened where it rose!  
The moss-hung thing, it seemed to wave  
The worn-out garments of a grave,—  
To wave and wave its old grave-clothes.

Close by, a cow rose up and lowed  
From out a palm-thatched milking-shed;  
A black boy on the river road  
Fled sudden, as the night had fled:

A nude black boy,—a bit of night  
That had been broken off and lost  
From flying night, the time it crossed  
The soundless river in its flight.

A bit of darkness, following  
The sable night on sable wing,—  
A bit of darkness, dumb with fear,  
Because that nameless tomb was near.

Then holy bells came pealing out;  
Then steamboats blew, then horses neighed;  
Then smoke from hamlets round about  
Crept out, as if no more afraid.

Then shrill cocks here, and shrill cocks there,  
Stretched glossy necks and filled the air;—  
How many cocks it takes to make  
A country morning well awake!

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

Then many boughs, with many birds,—  
Young boughs in green, old boughs in gray;  
These birds had very much to say,  
In their soft, sweet, familiar words.

And all seemed sudden glad; the gloom  
Forgot the church, forgot the tomb;  
And yet, like monks with cross and bead,  
The myrtles leaned to read and read.

And oh, the fragrance of the sod!  
And oh, the perfume of the air!  
The sweetness, sweetness everywhere,  
That rose like incense up to God!

\* \* \* \*

I like a cow's breath in sweet spring;  
I like the breath of babes new-born;  
A maid's breath is a pleasant thing,—  
But oh, the breath of sudden morn!—

Of sudden morn, when every pore  
Of Mother Earth is pulsing fast  
With life, and life seems spilling o'er  
With love, with love too sweet to last:

Of sudden morn beneath the sun,  
By God's great river wrapped in gray,  
That for a space forgets to run,  
And hides his face, as if to pray.

A SONG OF THE SOUTH ,

XI

The black-eyed Creole kept his eyes  
Turned to the door, as eyes might turn  
To see the holy embers burn  
Some sin away at sacrifice.

Full dawn! but yet he knew no dawn,  
Nor song of bird, nor bird on wing,  
Nor breath of rose, nor anything  
Her fair face lifted not upon.

And yet he taller stood with morn;  
His bright eyes, brighter than before,  
Burned fast against that favored door,  
His proud lips lifting still with scorn,—

With lofty, silent scorn for one  
Who all night long had plead and plead,  
With none to witness but the dead  
How he for gold had been undone.

O ye who feed a greed for gold  
And barter truth, and trade sweet youth  
For cold, hard gold, behold, behold!  
Behold this man! behold this truth!

Why what is there in all God's plan  
Of vast creation, high or low,  
By sea or land, by sun or snow,  
So mean, so miserly as man?

\* \* \* \*

Lo, earth and heaven all let go  
Their garnered riches, year by year!

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## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

The treasures of the trackless snow,  
Ah, hast thou seen how very dear?

The wide earth gives, gives golden grain,  
Gives fruits of gold, gives all, gives all!  
Hold forth your hand, and these shall fall  
In your full palm as free as rain.

Yea, earth is generous. The trees  
Strip nude as birth-time without fear;  
And their reward is year by year  
To feel their fullness but increase.

The law of Nature is to give,  
To give, to give! and to rejoice  
In giving with a generous voice,  
And so trust God and truly live.

\* \* \* \*

But see this miser at the last,—  
This man who loved, who worshipped gold,  
Who grasped gold with such eager hold,  
He fain must hold forever fast:

As if to hold what God lets go;  
As if to hold, while all around  
Lets go and drops upon the ground  
All things as generous as snow.

Let go your hold! let go or die!  
Let go poor soul! Do not refuse  
Till death comes by and shakes you loose,  
And sends you shamed to hell for aye!

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

What if the sun should keep his gold?  
The rich moon lock her silver up?  
What if the gold-clad buttercup  
Became such miser, mean and old?

Ah, me! the coffins are so true  
In all accounts, the shrouds so thin  
That down there you might sew and sew,  
Nor ever sew one pocket in.

And all that you can hold of lands  
Down there, below the grass, down there,  
Will only be that little share  
You hold in your two dust-full hands.

### XII

She comes! she comes! The stony floor  
Speaks out! And now the rusty door  
At last has just one word this day,  
With mute, religious lips, to say.

She comes! she comes! And lo, her face  
Is upward, radiant, fair as prayer!  
So pure here in this holy place,  
Where holy peace is everywhere.

Her upraised face, her face of light  
And loveliness, from duty done,  
Is like a rising orient sun  
That pushes back the brow of night.

\* \* \* \* \*

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

How brave, how beautiful is truth!  
Good deeds untold are like to this.  
But fairest of all fair things is  
A pious maiden in her youth:

A pious maiden as she stands  
Just on the threshold of the years  
That throb and pulse with hopes and fears,  
And reaches God her helpless hands.  
\* \* \* \*

How fair is she! How fond is she!  
Her foot upon the threshold there.  
Her breath is as a blossomed tree,—  
This maiden mantled in her hair!

Her hair, her black abundant hair,  
Where night inhabited, all night  
And all this day, will not take flight,  
But finds content and houses there.

Her hands are clasped, her two small hands:  
They hold the holy book of prayer  
Just as she steps the threshold there,  
Clasped downward where she silent stands.

### XIII

Once more she lifts her lowly face,  
And slowly lifts her large, dark eyes  
Of wonder, and in still surprise  
She looks full forward in her place.

She looks full forward on the air  
Above the tomb, and yet below

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## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

---

The fruits of gold, the blooms of snow,  
As looking—looking anywhere.

She feels—she knows not what she feels:  
It is not terror, is not fear.  
But there is something that reveals  
A presence that is near and dear.

She does not let her eyes fall down,  
They lift against the far profound:  
Against the blue above the town  
Two wide-winged vultures circle round.

Two brown birds swim above the sea,—  
Her large eyes swim as dreamily,  
And follow far, and follow high,  
Two circling black specks in the sky.

One forward step,—the closing door  
Creaks out, as frightened or in pain;  
Her eyes are on the ground again—  
Two men are standing close before.

“My love,” sighs one, “my life, my all!”  
Her lifted foot across the sill  
Sinks down,—and all things are so still  
You hear the orange-blossoms fall.

But fear comes not where duty is,  
And purity is peace and rest;  
Her cross is close upon her breast,  
Her two hands clasp hard hold of this.

Her two hands clasp cross, book, and she  
Is strong in tranquil purity,—

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

Aye, strong as Samson when he laid  
His two hands forth and bowed and prayed.

One at her left, one at her right,  
And she between the steps upon,—  
I can but see that Syrian night,  
The women there at early dawn.

### XIV

The sky is like an opal sea,  
The air is like the breath of kine;  
But oh, her face is white, and she  
Leans faint to see a lifted sign,—

To see two hands lift up and wave,—  
To see a face so white with woe,  
So ghastly, hollow, white as though  
It had that moment left the grave.

Her sweet face at that ghostly sign,  
Her fair face in her weight of hair,  
Is like a white dove drowning there,—  
A white dove drowned in Tuscan wine.

He tries to stand, to stand erect;  
'T is gold, 't is gold that holds him down!  
And soul and body both must drown,—  
Two millstones tied about his neck.

Now once again his piteous face  
Is raised to her face reaching there  
He prays such piteous silent prayer,  
As prays a dying man for grace.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

It is not good to see him strain  
To lift his hands, to gasp, to try  
To speak. His parched lips are so dry  
Their sight is as a living pain,

I think that rich man down in hell  
Some like this old man with his gold,—  
To gasp and gasp perpetual,  
Like to this minute I have told.

### XV

At last the miser cries his pain,—  
A shrill, wild cry, as if a grave  
Just op'd its stony lips and gave  
One sentence forth, then closed again.

“’T was twenty years last night, last night!”  
His lips still moved, but not to speak;  
His outstretched hands, so trembling weak,  
Were beggar’s hands in sorry plight.

His face upturned to hers; his lips  
Kept talking on, but gave no sound;  
His feet were cloven to the ground;  
Like iron hooks his finger tips.

“Aye, twenty years,” she sadly sighed;  
“I promised mother every year,  
That I would pray for father here,  
As she still prayed the night she died:

“To pray as she prayed, fervently,  
As she had promised she would pray

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

The sad night that he turned away,  
For him, wherever he might be."

Then she was still; then sudden she  
Let fall her eyes, and so outspake,  
As if her very heart would break,  
Her proud lips trembling piteously:

"And whether he comes soon or late  
To kneel beside this nameless grave,  
May God forgive my father's hate  
As I forgive, as she forgave!"

He saw the stone; he understood,  
With that quick knowledge that will come  
Most quick when men are made most dumb  
With terror that stops still the blood.

And then a blindness slowly fell  
On soul and body; but his hands  
Held tight his bags, two iron bands,  
As if to bear them into hell.

He sank upon the nameless stone  
With oh! such sad, such piteous moan  
As never man might seek to know  
From man's most unforgiving foe.

He sighed at last, so long, so deep,  
As one heart breaking in one's sleep,—  
One long, last, weary, willing sigh,  
As if it were a grace to die.

## A SONG OF THE SOUTH

And then his hands, like loosened bands,  
Hung down, hung down, on either side;  
His hands hung down, hung open wide:  
Wide empty hung the dead man's hands.



## RESURGO SAN FRANCISCO

This tall, strong City stands today  
The fairest, comeliest fashionings  
Of marble, granite, concrete, clay  
That ever fell from human hand;  
That ever flourished sea or land,  
Or wooed the sea-world's wide white-wings.  
This concrete City stands today,  
The newest, truest, man has wrought;  
The kindest, cleanest, strongest, yea  
Twice strongest City, deed or thought,  
Thrice strongest ever lost or won—  
Thrice strongest wall, without, within  
That is or ever yet has been  
Beneath the broad path of the Sun.

Behold her Seven Hills loom white  
Once more as marble-built Rome.  
Her marts teem with a touch of home  
And music fills her halls at night;  
Her streets flow populous, and light  
Floods every happy, hopeful face;  
The wheel of fortune whirls apace  
And old-time fare and dare hold sway.  
Farewell the blackened, toppling wall,  
The bent steel gird, the somber pall—  
Farewell forever, let us pray;  
Farewell forever and a day!

How beauteous her lifted brow!  
How heartfelt her harmonious song!  
How strong her heart, how more than strong  
She stands rewrought, refashioned now!  
Her concrete bastions, knit with steel,

## RESURGO SAN FRANCISCO

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Sing symphonies in stately forms,  
Make harmonies that mock at storms,  
Make music that you can but feel.  
And yet, and yet what ropes of sand,  
What wisps of straw in God's right hand—  
And yet, my risen city, yet  
Your prophets must not now forget:

Must not forget how you laid hold  
This whole west world as all your own—  
How sat this sea-bank as a throne,  
How strewed these very streets with gold,  
How laid hard tribute, land and sea,  
Heaped silver, gold incessantly!  
The simple Mexicans' broad lands  
You coveted, thrust forth both hands,  
Then bade Ramona plead her cause  
In unknown language, unknown laws!  
You robbed her, robbed her without shame:  
Ay, even of her virtuous name!

Nor shall your prophets now forget,  
Now that you stand sublimely strong,  
How when these vast estates were set  
With granaries that burst in song,  
You spurned the heathen at your feet  
Because he begged to toil to eat;  
Because he plead with bended head  
For work, for work and barely bread.  
Yea, how you laughed his lack of pride,  
And lied and laughed, and laughed and lied  
And mocked him, in your pride and hate,  
Then in his gaunt face banged your Gate!

## RESURGO SAN FRANCISCO

Nay, not forget, now that you rise  
Triumphant, strong as Abram's song,  
How that you lied the lie of lies  
And wrought the Nipponese such wrong,  
Then sent your convict chief to plead  
The President expel them hence.  
Ah me, what black, rank insolence!  
What rank, black infamy indeed!  
Because their ways, their hands were clean,  
You feared the difference between,  
Feared they might surely be preferred  
Above your howling, convict herd!

Their sober, sane life put to shame  
Your noisome, drunken penal band  
That howled in Labor's sacred name,  
Nor wrought, nor even lifted hand,  
Save but to stone and mock and moil  
Their betters who but asked to toil.  
Yon harvest-fields cried out as when  
Your country cries for fighting men,  
And yet your hordes, by force and fraud,  
Forbade this first, last law of God!  
And you? You sat supinely by  
And gathered gold, nor reckoned why!

Your great, proud men heaped gold on gold;  
They heaped deep cellars with such hoard  
Of costliest wines, rich, rare, and old  
As never Thebes or Babel stored—  
They sat at wine till ghostly dawn. . . .

The ides had come but had not gone;  
For lo! the writing on the wall  
And then the surge, the topple, fall—



## RESURGO SAN FRANCISCO

Then dust, then darkness, then such light  
As never yet lit day or night,  
And there was neither night nor day,  
For night and day were burned away!

Hear me once more, my city, heed!  
I may not kiss again your tears  
Nor point your drunken, grasping greed,  
For I am stricken well with years,  
But do ye as you erst have done,  
Despise His daughter, mock His son—  
If still the sow her wallow keeps  
And wine runs as a rivulet,  
My harp hangs where the willow weeps.  
Nay, nay, I must not now forget  
The sin, the shame, the feast, the fall,  
The red handwriting on the wall.

Then let me not behold once more  
Your flowing cellars, mile on mile,  
A sea of flame without a shore  
Or even one lone, lifted isle.  
Let me not hear it, feel it choke,  
A wild beast choking in his chain  
The while he tugs and leaps in vain  
And drinks his death of flaming smoke.  
Spare me this nightmare, pray you spare  
This black three days of blank despair!  
Spare me this red-black, surging sea  
Of leaping, choking agony.

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I call one witness, only one,  
In proof that God is God, and just:  
Yon high-heaved dome, débris and dust.

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## RESURGO SAN FRANCISCO

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With torn lips lifted to the sun,  
In desolation still, lords all—  
The rent and ruined City Hall.  
And here throbbed San Francisco's heart,  
And here her madness held high mart—  
Sold justice, sold black shame, sold hell.  
And here, right here, God's high hand fell,  
Fell hardest, hottest, first, and worst—  
Your huge high Hall, the most accurst!

Therefore I say tempt not the fates.  
Love meekness more, love folly less.  
The stranger housed within thy gates  
Hold sacred in his lowliness.  
That pride which runs before a fall—  
Behold God's Angels fell from pride!  
And He, the lowly crucified?  
Ye would have stoned Him, one and all.  
Beware the pride of race, beware  
The pride of creed, long pompous prayer—  
Who made your High Priest higher than  
The humblest, honest Chinaman?



## THE LAST GREAT SAN FRANCISCO FIRE

In bed but quite awake, April 18th, that warm, sweet spring morning, with the door wide open, as usual, I felt a slight bump, then a jar, such as you might feel when your little fishing-boat bumps against the wharf when you are about to land; then, after turning my face to the open door and sitting up in my Klondike skins, there came another bump, and still more distinct. I stepped to the door of my little cottage, and then a third and last jolt, but not hard enough to disturb the glassware or anything about the place. However, I at once heard my cattle bellowing on the hills above me and two cats scurried past on the wall of the terrace below.

To my left, at the door of a lower little cottage, a half-dressed Japanese stood, smiling to see me on my feet so early, as he said "Ohioa," the salutation good morning: then he added, "Earthquake!" To the right, close at hand, at the door of another little cottage, a second little brown man stood smiling serenely; and then the same salutation and brief expression, and we all went back into our little sleeping places and dressed, and came out and went up the hill to look after the cattle. But they were mostly feeding quietly and content; only a few came straggling out of the brush, as if they had suddenly, in their fright, fled to the wooded steeps for protection; and I noticed that the bevvies of morning birds, which I had gathered about me in great numbers during the past dozen years, were suddenly very alert and expressive, as if more than glad. From

## THE LAST GREAT SAN FRANCISCO FIRE

all of which I knew that the earthquake was over with.

But just about this time, less than forty minutes from the first shock, I began to see black smoke issuing, pouring straight up and out from the city of San Francisco, along the water front. The stillness, now that the cows were quiet and the birds back to their normal repose, was so noticeable that I took up pad and pencil and wrote:

"Stillness oppressive, painful. . . . Not a breath stirring . . . stillest and clearest morning ever seen in California."

Then, after directing a boy to get my buggy, I went into my cottage, had coffee and sat on the porch and looked down at the dense black smoke across the bay, on the water's edge of the city. This, as the crow flies, is about eight miles distant and exactly one thousand feet below.

Then I began to hear great explosions. I looked at my watch, then wrote:

"Forty-five minutes from first shock and the city on fire; smoke in a dozen places; some flames high in the air away up and out by the Mission; sky clear, except for black columns of smoke, rising straight up, but big guns or explosions every minute, almost every second. Must go down. My place is on the firing line; maybe I can help some one; then I must get to the Bohemian Club."

Finding no cars running at the moment, I drove to Alameda and took boat over to the city, where it was hard landing because of the dense mass of half-clad refugees. And such a roaring of explosions! I took an officer in and drove on up and out to the left, where it was possible

## THE LAST GREAT SAN FRANCISCO FIRE

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to pass toward the Mission. Soon there were cinders in the air, bits of burning paper fell here and there, and the sidewalks and streets in this poorer part of the city began to take fire. Soon Federal officers came hurrying by, going where? Their horses were frantic, and they were as wild as their horses. The air began to be hot and close. The crowds, hastening on foot to the ferry, grew more dense, at last impassable, and the officer got out, put a woman and three half-nude children in the buggy, managed, with the help of his club, to turn the horse, and so led back and on to the boat.

From the bay we could not only hear but feel, see this incessant roar of explosions. The commanding general at the Presidio had been ordered to take charge, and they were blowing up the city!

The tumult in the city was terrible. The people stood on the boat while we steamed away as solidly as they could be packed, and we sank to the water's edge; but all the officers of the boat and all the police were manly, quiet, cool, and, so far from any violence, the people were quite orderly; in truth, it was like Sunday evening at church. But if there had been a bit of wind or rough weather or any great disturbance, the boat had never reached land. And all the time this incessant blowing up of the city! And why this persistent, incessant and senseless blowing up of the city?

You blow up a house in order to get it down to where you can pour a flood of water on the flames and so establish a fire brake; but it had been discovered, in the first half hour, that there

## THE LAST GREAT SAN FRANCISCO FIRE

was no water. The water mains had been rent at the first shock. Then why blow the houses to splinters, make kindling wood of costly palaces, so that they could be more easily devoured by the flames? It was the most insane act in all history.

But it went on and on and on until there was nothing more to destroy with.

I tried on the second day to reach some papers, very precious to me, at the Bohemian Club. I was hurled back from the door by a hatless and half-drunk soldier; as his companion, who sat on the stairs with a bottle and a sandwich, laughed and called me "Old Santa Claus." Not far from here I saw an old man literally on his knees, begging an officer to not blow up his property. "Leave it to the mercy of God, leave it to the good God! You see there is no wind. This stillness is a prayer, a promise. Leave my block, the work of a lifetime, to the mercy of God!"

There are thousands and thousands of men who, like myself, would rather forget than recount these insane acts, but should they open their lips at all would tell a bookful of like incidents. There are those who are weak enough and vain enough to insist that it be said of them that they saved this or that fragment of San Francisco from the flames. I take the responsibility of saying that the remnants of San Francisco were saved only because there was no more dynamite. The only reason why San Francisco was not entirely destroyed is that the mad destroyers had no further means of destruction at hand. This may seem a hard saying, but it is my duty to say it: for it may save other cities in the

## THE LAST GREAT SAN FRANCISCO FIRE

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day of their calamity. Sheridan was quite right in blowing down houses so that he could drown them in a deluge of water at hand. But if there is no water, as was the case in San Francisco? Why, they were merely making kindling wood of everything in sight, if not literally setting the heap on fire with their own hands.

Goodness! how I wish I could forget it all! But there are at least a hundred thousand who must remember it all with me; and any one of these will say with me that San Francisco was mad, mad, and all her head officials were mad. I am not accusing them or rebuking them. They were simply mad.

The dynamite was all gone, and then and only then did the flames begin to subside. An insane mayor and his insane men rushed here and there, the commanding general as mad as the others, all a mad, a helpless mob. I have seen such but once: in the last days of the Commune.

It was not only the madness of the dying Commune, but the culminating madness of Simon and John, when Titus, the son of Vespasian, besieged doomed and dying Jerusalem.

And all this because San Francisco had been mad, insanely conceited, cruel, selfish, mean to the stranger and merciless to those whom she had plundered. All this desperate greed for glory, gain, this sleepless, restless forgetting of God and glorifying of themselves could only end in the madness of the Commune, the madness of those three dread days of April.

San Francisco had been built, burnt and rebuilt from thousands of shiploads of Oregon white cedar, cut from the coast of Port Orford and the

## THE LAST GREAT SAN FRANCISCO FIRE

once-famous Gold Beach, reaching from the California line to that richest of all Oregon rivers, the Siouslaw. These mighty forests had been hewn down by rich mill companies at will, without consideration or question. Only the choicest parts of the noble trees were used; the remainder was left where it fell. This Oregon coast was rich and populous in these early days, very rich and populous indeed, until all at once the overthrown wilderness became literally "A Sea of Fire." Thousands of homes were burned; hundreds perished. This was the first of our great forest fires. The poem with which this volume opens was written for the purpose of calling the attention of the country to this condition of things.

The builders of San Francisco had, indirectly, destroyed the noblest cedar forest since Hiram of Tyre. . . .

No man should ever be chosen Mayor of a great city like San Francisco without some good, common sense ideas about how to battle with the elements of destruction. Nor should any officer be allowed to leave West Point or Annapolis without knowing how to fight fire or flood wisely and well. For no telling when some sudden calamity may put him at the head of affairs.

It is not pleasant to insist that this city was not destroyed by earthquake, but by fire: and that that fire was helped forward by every means in the power of a stupid and ignorant man to bestow. Against the general of the army there can be no serious charge, for he was not trained at West Point and did not pretend to know what best to do; nor did he claim any great glory.



## THE LAST GREAT SAN FRANCISCO FIRE

But the ignorant and officious Mayor, who had all sorts of claims to his credit as the saviour of the city, was the best ally the devouring element could possibly have had: a sort of second fiddling Nero. Only he was much worse than Nero. For he should have stuck to his fiddle and let the fire alone.





















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